

STUDIES IN STAGECRAFT

CLAYTON HAMILTON



217
for this is my mind, this one

† pleasure have I, of



† books to have great plenty.

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STUDIES IN STAGECRAFT

Uniform with This Volume

The Theory of the Theatre

By CLAYTON HAMILTON

Fourth Printing

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STUDIES IN STAGE- CRAFT

BY

CLAYTON HAMILTON

MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS



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1914

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TO
Walter Hampden
FIRST AND FOREMOST OF MY FRIENDS

PREFACE

THIS book is a companion volume to *THE THEORY OF THE THEATRE*. The principles outlined in the former work were derived from a study of dramatic art in general, without particular reference to any single period; but the principles outlined in the present work have been derived mainly from a study of the drama of to-day. In this growing age of stagecraft, it is necessary that criticism should bestir itself to keep astride with the rapid revolutions in dramatic artistry that are being effected before our very eyes. *THE THEORY OF THE THEATRE* dealt chiefly with principles inherited by the present from the past: but *STUDIES IN STAGECRAFT* deals chiefly with principles that seem destined to be bequeathed by the present to the future.

Most of the studies included in this volume have appeared, in earlier versions, in one or another of the magazines in which, in recent years, I have conducted departments of dramatic criticism,—namely, *The Bookman*, *Vogue*, *Everybody's Magazine*, and *Dress and Vanity Fair*. One chapter has been compounded from two papers contributed to *Art and Progress*. To the proprietors of these publications I am indebted for the privilege of quoting from my contributions to their pages. It is scarcely necessary to add that these studies have been diligently revised and, in many passages, entirely rewritten.

C. H.

NEW YORK CITY: 1914.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE NEW ART OF MAKING PLAYS	3
II THE PICTORIAL STAGE	11
III THE DECORATIVE DRAMA	25
IV THE DRAMA OF ILLUSION	34
V THE MODERN ART OF STAGE-DIRECTION	43
VI A PLEA FOR A NEW TYPE OF PLAY	65
VII THE PERIOD OF PRAGMATISM	83
VIII THE UNDRAMATIC DRAMA	92
IX THE VALUE OF STAGE CONVENTIONS	104
X THE SUPERNATURAL DRAMA	112
XI THE IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE	123
XII THE PERSONALITY OF THE PLAYWRIGHT	145
XIII THEMES AND STORIES ON THE STAGE	153
XIV PLAUSIBILITY IN PLAYS	162
XV INFIRMITY OF PURPOSE	167
XVI WHERE TO BEGIN A PLAY	175
XVII CONTINUITY OF STRUCTURE	183
XVIII RHYTHM AND TEMPO	188
XIX THE PLAYS OF YESTERYEAR	194
XX A NEW DEFENSE OF MELODRAMA	208
XXI THE ART OF THE MOVING-PICTURE PLAY	225
XXII THE ONE-ACT PLAY IN AMERICA	240
XXIII ORGANIZING AN AUDIENCE	257
XXIV THE FUNCTION OF DRAMATIC CRITICISM	273
INDEX	289

STUDIES IN STAGECRAFT

STUDIES IN STAGECRAFT

I

THE NEW ART OF MAKING PLAYS

THE great Spanish dramatist, Lope de Vega, once wrote a didactic poem entitled *The New Art of Making Plays*; and this title seems particularly applicable to the art of the drama at the present time. We are living in a progressive period, when the methods of all our practical and theoretical activities are undergoing a rapid revolution; and it is therefore not surprising that we should find the technique of the drama changing year by year before our very eyes.

A few years ago, the President Emeritus of Harvard University made the somewhat startling statement that civilization had progressed faster and further in the last hundred years than in all of the preceding twenty centuries, and that the conditions of life at the close of the eighteenth century differed more from the conditions at the present day than they differed from those which appertained to ancient Rome. Similarly, it may

be asserted that the art of the theatre has progressed faster and further in the last thirty years than in all of the preceding centuries that have intervened since *Æschylus*, and that we find ourselves confronted at the present time with an utterly new art of making plays. In this connection it should be confessed at once that progress is not necessarily amelioration, and that there is always a possibility that a step forward may be a step away from the ideal. In some respects the general life of ancient Athens was better than our general life to-day, for all its practical advantages of telephones and trolley-cars; and in many respects the drama of *Sophocles* and *Shakespeare* was better than the drama of *Pinero*, in spite of all our present perfectness of craftsmanship. But the student of any art should dally little with such absolute and final questions as that of what is better and what is worse; and he may spend his time more profitably in the modest endeavor of defining differences.

The differences between the drama of to-day and the drama of all preceding periods have not as yet been clearly and emphatically defined to the theatre-going public; and this is the reason why many of the best artistic efforts of our current theatre remain misunderstood and are denied their proper measure of appreciation. In the evolution of any art, creation always precedes

criticism, since criticism is merely an analysis of what has been created; and the main difficulty that is encountered by the best practitioners of the new art of making plays is the fact that our current dramatic criticism has not as yet caught up with them. Their new efforts are judged by old standards; and *The Thunderbolt*, or *The Pigeon*, or *The Blue Bird*, or *What Every Woman Knows*, are still considered to be something less than masterpieces, because, in both materials and methods, they differ markedly from *As You Like It* or *Tartufe*. It is therefore desirable that we should endeavor to enumerate at least a few of the definitive features of the new art of making plays; and this purpose may be most easily fulfilled by setting forth several of the most noticeable differences between the drama of the present and the drama of the past.

In the first place, we should note that, whereas the drama of other days was compounded of only two elements of narrative — namely, character and action — the drama of to-day is compounded of three elements — namely, action, character, and setting. Dramatic incidents which used to be conceived as happening anywhere and any-when are now conceived as happening at a particular time and in a particular place.

This localization of incidents in place and time may be noted, in all the narrative arts, as the one

feature that distinguishes modern work from that of all preceding periods. In his essay on Victor Hugo's romances, Robert Louis Stevenson pointed out that the one new note introduced into the novel at the outset of the nineteenth century was the insistence on environment as a formative influence on character and a determining motive toward action. But the drama could not cope with this modern philosophical conception of the importance of environment until the great wave of mechanical invention which swept over the world during the middle of the nineteenth century had equipped the theatre with those appurtenances which were necessary to enable it to project the element of setting adequately to the eye.

But this epoch-making revolution in the physical equipment of the stage occasioned an alteration in the very essence of the drama. In all former ages the drama had made its appeal primarily to the ear, like the arts of poetry and music; but now for the first time it was enabled to make its appeal directly to the eye, like the arts of painting and sculpture. In our own days the art of the drama has ceased to be essentially an auditory art and has ranked itself for the first time in history as a visual art; and this point must be clearly understood if we are to appreciate properly the new art of making plays.

For this revolution in the basis of dramatic

appeal occasioned a necessary evolution in the art of acting. Whereas acting had formerly been a presentative art, it now became a representative art. The actor had formerly attracted attention to himself, like an orator upon a platform, and always in his work had presupposed an audience; but he was now required to comport himself as if no audience were present, and to treat his particular personality as only a component part of a general stage-picture.

And this alteration in the art of acting required an alteration in the art of writing for the stage. For the presentative actor it was necessary to write rotund, rhetorical speeches which should give him ample opportunity for elocution and the use of sweeping gesture; but for the representative actor it is necessary to write in the terms of common conversation. Any speech that is at all rhetorical will pull the modern actor out of the picture and will shatter that illusion of actuality which is the ultimate aim of the contemporary stage.

From this consideration we derive the precept that the highest exhibition of literary tact that may be achieved by the contemporary playwright is to persuade his audience that he is not employing any trick of literary style. Formerly plays were written in verse or polished prose; nowadays they must be written for the most part in casual,

drifting colloquialisms. People do not actually talk in verse; neither do they talk in formal prose; and it has therefore become the leading literary merit of our latter-day drama to present its dialogue divested of all "literary" turns of phrase.

Actions speak louder than words. This proverb has become an axiom of our new art of making plays. No less an authority than Mr. Augustus Thomas has asserted that every good play of the contemporary type must merely add the element of dialogue to a pantomime that is already good. The modern playwright must rely more upon his visual imagination than upon his literary skill, and must be able to conceive his narrative primarily as a drift of moving pictures.

In this requirement he may be aided greatly by the collaboration of that new and very interesting functionary of the modern theatre, the stage-director of his play. It is the business of the stage-director to coördinate the contributions of the author, the actors, the designer of the scenery and costumes, and the manipulator of the lights, into an harmonious work of art. The stage-director is often, in the contemporary theatre, the dominant artist of the drama; and in any critical consideration of a play that has passed through his hands, it is frequently more necessary to devote attention to his artistry than to that of either the actors or the author. Any

play, for instance, that has been produced by Mr. David Belasco must be studied as a Belasco play, regardless of who wrote it or of who the actors were.

These alterations in the materials and methods of the drama have required, in recent years, a corresponding change in the construction of our theatres. So long as the drama remained an auditory art projected by a presentative actor, it could be housed effectively in an ample auditorium; but when it became a visual art exhibited by an unobtrusive actor, it called for a theatre that should gather a selected audience into intimate proximity with the stage. Hence, throughout the last thirty years, our theatres have progressively been diminished in size, until the prevailing type at present is no larger than the Maxine Elliott Theatre in New York. It is a matter of history that the promising project of the New Theatre failed mainly because the edifice which housed the institution was too large to permit of the effective presentation of the prevailing type of the contemporary drama. Very recently an exaggeration of the present tendency in theatrical construction has been evidenced by the advent of the Little Theatre, which is surely more diminutive than necessary. But this current aspect of the craft of theatre-building is one of the points that must be taken into consideration in

any critical judgment of our new art of making plays.

It should be evident from these brief enumerations that it is impossible to measure the contemporary drama by the same critical standards that have been applied to the dramatic art of other ages. The very merits of the Elizabethan drama become defects when we observe them from the point of view of the contemporary theatre; and the faults of other-minded periods have been erected into the virtues of our own.

A new art of criticism is required to interpret our new art of making plays. As yet our contemporary creation in the drama is more noble than the interpretation that it has received. This is the reason, doubtless, why so many well-meaning societies are organized for the "uplifting" of the modern stage, and why so few endeavors are instituted for the appreciation of the theatre of to-day. But any age of the drama that is illustrated by the simultaneous activities of Pinero and Brieux and Sudermann and Maeterlinck and Shaw and Hauptmann and Hervieu and Galsworthy is undeniably a great age; and it is therefore the responsible and humble duty of our dramatic critics to teach the general public to estimate it at its worth.

II

THE PICTORIAL STAGE

THE elevation of the element of setting to an importance coördinate with that of the elements of character and action, which has rendered the contemporary drama more visual in its appeal than the drama of any earlier period, was occasioned by the combination of two causes, one of which was artistic and the other scientific, yet both of which tended toward that end which is the aim of every epoch-making revolution — namely, a return to nature.

The first, or artistic, cause of the revolution in the drama had already been at work for a long time in the other arts to which the drama is allied. If we review the history of any of the arts which represent human beings, we shall notice that the one feature which distinguishes most clearly their ancient from their modern manifestations is the growing importance which has been bestowed in modern times upon the element of setting. Ancient art projects its figures abstractly, out of place, out of time; modern art projects them concretely, in a particular place, at a particular

time. Even in imagination we cannot localize the *Venus of Melos*; we are forced to look upon her with no sense of where or when. But we know that Saint-Gaudens's *Farragut* is standing on the bridge of a ship and peering forward into the wind to direct the course of its progress; and we know that his *Lincoln* in Chicago has just risen from a chair upon the platform at a public assembly and is about to address the audience before him.

The same distinction may be noted between ancient and modern painting. There is no background at all to the figures in Pompeiian frescoes; we see a dozen Cupids dancing, but we derive no idea whether they are dancing on the greensward or on a marble floor. Even in the great age of Italian painting the background is developed for a merely decorative purpose and is not brought into actual relation with the figures in the foreground. Leonardo's inscrutable background of jagged rocks and undetermined sky does not help us to decide whether Monna Lisa is actually indoors or out of doors; wherever she is, she is certainly not wandering through that lonely and uninhabitable vale. I doubt if any of the Italians ever painted a greater landscape than that which decorates the distance in the Castelfranco *Madonna* of Giorgione; but, in the actual and literal sense, that landscape has absolutely nothing to do

with the Madonna herself or either of her two attendant saints. But the Dutch, who in this regard are the first of modern painters, chose to display their human figures in living relation to the landscape or comfortably at home in an interior belonging to them. In such a typical modern painting as the *Angelus* of Millet, the people would lose all meaning if they were taken out of the landscape and the landscape would lose all meaning if it were divested of the people; the sense of a definite time and a definite place, which ancient art suppresses, are here as necessary to the picture as the people themselves or the act of devotion in which they are engaged.

A similar revolution has been accomplished gradually in the art of literary narrative. The earliest tales in the literature of every nation happen "once upon a time," — it does not matter when, it hardly matters where. Medieval stories like the *novelle* of Boccaccio happen either out of doors in a conventional landscape or indoors in a conventional palace; but all palaces look alike, and every landscape is more decorative than habitable. It was only toward the end of the eighteenth century that novelists began to develop their settings in harmony with their action and their characters; and it was not until the nineteenth century that they began to insist that certain people can accomplish certain deeds only

in a certain place and at a certain time. Such a story, for example, as Mr. Kipling's *An Habitation Enforced*, in which the setting is the prime motive and (as it were) the hero of the tale, is exclusively characteristic of the present age of narrative and could never have been conceived in any former period.

It was inevitable that this growing sense of the importance of the element of setting as a necessary factor in human life, and therefore as an essential detail of art, should overtake the drama; but its conquest of the drama was deferred until the present age because at no earlier period was the theatre adequately equipped to cope with the demands that it imposed. The second, or scientific, cause of the revolution in the drama was the great wave of practical invention which swept over the nineteenth century and made the modern theatre possible. The introduction in quick succession of gas lamps, the calcium light, and electrical illumination, the consequent abolition of the "apron" stage, the invention of the "box-set," the new conception of the proscenium as a picture-frame and the stage itself as a picture placed within it, the growing zest for actuality in the appointments and the furniture of the stage—these practical improvements in the theatre had to be accomplished before the drama could follow the lead of all the other narrative arts in ex-

hibiting characters in action with precise attention to particularities of time and place.

We derive from a typical Greek tragedy no more definite sense of place and time than we derive from looking at the *Venus of Melos*. The action simply happens—we care not when or where. In most Elizabethan plays the action is exhibited merely as happening on the bare platform of the stage. When an actor walks upon the stage he walks into the story; when he leaves the stage he leaves the story, and we never ask where he has gone to. A few of the Elizabethans—and this is particularly true of Shakespeare—exhibit a truly modern feeling for setting as an influence on character and action; but since their theatre was not equipped to represent setting to the eye, they were forced to suggest it to the imagination in passages of descriptive poetry. Whenever we need to know the exact place or the exact hour of a scene, Shakespeare has to tell us in his lines. He does it wonderfully—“How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank,” or “’Tis now the very witching time of night”; but on the modern stage we do all this with scenery and lighting, and make the same effect directly, by pictorial, rather than indirectly, by literary, means. The tragedies of Corneille and Racine could all be played in a single stage-set—the

conventional hall of a conventional palace. Molière, in his entire series of comedies and farces, used only three distinct stage-sets — one the public square of old Italian comedy in which are situated all the houses of all the leading characters, another conceived vaguely out of doors in the country, and the third representing a room in a house. When the action happens in a room, as in *Le Tartufe*, the set is not designed particularly to represent the personality of the man who owns the house nor the habits of the people who live in it. Furthermore, it is the only room in the whole house that is imagined to exist; and when a character leaves the stage he does not go into an adjacent room but walks bodily out of the story.

But for every act of every play in the contemporary theatre we imagine a particular set that is entirely new and is devised especially to fit the action and to complement the characters. We know exactly what is beyond every door and every window; and when an actor passes through a door we know where he is going. We select and arrange the furniture for the insight it will give into the habits and the taste of the person to whom the room belongs. We keep a most careful accounting of time, and indicate its passage by minute gradations in the lighting. We convey as much as we possibly can by visual means, and we rely

upon the lines only when the appeal to the eye has reached its limit.

It is an axiom of art that a new opportunity imposes a new obligation; and the artist in the modern theatre is obliged to make his setting tell as much of his story as it can be made to tell. No better illustration of this point has been afforded in recent seasons than the novel and charming set devised by Mr. Louis N. Parker for his pleasant little comedy of happiness, *Pomander Walk*. The stage exhibited five little Queen Anne houses arrayed in a crescent beside the loitering Thames and inhabited by a dozen or more delectable people wearing the picturesque old costumes of 1805; and the narrative was woven out of the humorous and sentimental threads of their several life-stories. Divested of its setting, this exquisite little piece could not possibly be presented; the play would lose all its meaning if it should lose its scenery.

In the modern theatre we have learned to convey abstract ideas by visual "business," as Mr. Augustus Thomas conveys his ideas about nervous and hysterical disease by the "business" of the cat's-eye jewel in the last act of *The Witching Hour*, or as he explains his theory of the influence of colors on the human temperament in the third act of *The Harvest Moon*. We have learned to draw character completely to the eye, without the

use of words, as Sir James Barrie, at the opening of *What Every Woman Knows*, makes us fully acquainted with the personal traits of all three of Maggie's brothers in the three or four minutes that elapse before the first line of the play is spoken. In Herman Bahr's *The Concert*, the theme and the entire story of the play are summed up and uttered eloquently to the eye in a period of protracted silence which culminates at the second curtain-fall.

Whereas the poetry of the drama was formerly expressed exclusively in the lines, it is now expressed mainly through the pictorial appurtenances of the stage. It is by no means true that the drama has lost its capacity for expressing poetry; it has merely altered its means of expressing it. Mr. Belasco's original one-act version of *Madam Butterfly* was fully as poetic as the Elizabethan plays of Fletcher, whose verse still haunts our ears with melody as it echoes through the silence of three centuries. Poetry, in a large and general sense, may be defined as that solemn, tremulous happiness that overcomes us when we become unwittingly and poignantly aware of the existence and the presence of the beautiful. Poetry, thus conceived, may be expressed through the medium of any art; and Raphael is assuredly no less a poet though he may never have written that fabled century of sonnets. And poetry may

be conveyed as fittingly through our new art of making plays as through the rich and resonant medium of Elizabethan verse. In my entire experience of play-going I remember no more poetic moment in the theatre than that moment in the first act of M. Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice*, as produced at the New Theatre in New York, when the Prince Bellidor appears to Beatrice through the opened doorway, and the audience looks afar through a tracery of half-imagined trees to a sky of blue awakening to gray and palpitant with a single throbbing star.

In Elizabethan times it was necessary that every playwright should be able to express himself in verse. Nowadays a different equipment is required for the task of making plays. The contemporary theatre demands a vividness of visual imagination which has never in any other age been demanded of the dramatist. As the drama has reduced its reliance on the purely literary, it has increased its reliance on the purely pictorial; if it demands less of the imagination of the writer, it demands more of the imagination of the painter.

But this state of affairs has arisen only within the memory of the present generation of playgoers; and the art of designing stage scenery may, therefore, fairly be denominated the youngest of all the arts. This art is still so young, and

is being developed so rapidly year by year, that it is as yet extremely difficult to codify its leading principles. But three of these, at least, seem certain to subsist through any future unfolding of the art; and these three may safely be formulated at the present time.

1 First of all, the scenic artist must always plan his set to meet the narrative exigencies of the action. This fact imposes on him many limitations to which the usual painter of landscapes or interiors is not submitted; but, as a compensation, it offers to him many suggestions at the outset of his work which may prove stimulating to his instinct of invention. If a pistol is to be thrown through a window, as at the climax of *The City*, the window must be set in a convenient and emphatic place. If an important letter is to be written, a desk must be set in such a situation as to reveal the facial expression of the actor who is to write it. The number and the place of the doors to a room are conditioned by the narrative nature of the entrances; and the arrangement of trees and rocks in a landscape must conform to the needs of the actors in the traffic of the stage. The late Clyde Fitch, who always planned his own scenery, was exceedingly deft in devising settings that would aid the business of his narrative. In his last play, *The City*, he contrived a set for the first act that made it possible for him to conduct

an extended and important scene with no actors on the stage. He slanted a room so that two walls only were exhibited to the audience, one of which was pierced with sliding doors opening on a hallway which disclosed a flight of stairs leading to an upper story. The elder Rand, in the play, made an exit into the hallway, after which he was heard to drop heavily to the floor; and subsequently a hurried passing-by of many people in the hall, with sentences half-interjected through the opened doors, revealed to the audience that Rand had died suddenly of heart failure. On the other hand, in the production of *The School for Scandal* at the New Theatre, the setting of the screen scene was faulty because it hampered the business of the play. A staircase was devised elaborately to lead upward into the apartment of Joseph Surface from an outer door imagined under the stage; and this staircase was so arranged that every actor at his exit was obliged to turn his back to the audience and launch his final line over his shoulder. Thereby the sharp wit of Sheridan's exit speeches was impaired. Even if the stairway had been turned about, the entrance speeches of the actors would have been discounted similarly by the concealment of their faces. The only logical conclusion is that the staircase, which is clearly implied in Sheridan's lines, should have been imagined off the stage, as it was in Sheridan's

own day at Drury Lane, beyond an entrance door in the set itself.

2.

The second duty, or opportunity, of the scenic artist — according as we view the case — is to make his set so conform to the mood of the play that it will reveal immediately, through its visual appeal to the audience, as much as possible of the essential nature of the action. Contemporary dramatists depend upon their scenery to localize their plays in place and time, and to suggest the emotional spirit in which the story must be viewed. What Shakespeare did in long descriptive passages of verse, like the first speech of the banished duke in *As You Like It*, or the exquisite description of a moonlit night which opens the last act of *The Merchant of Venice*, is now done, without any lines at all, by the artist who designs the scenery. Under modern conditions, the stage-set of a room may often be made visually descriptive of the character who is supposed to inhabit it. Thus, in the first act of *The Music Master*, the personality of the hero was revealed before his entrance by the aspect of the room in which he lived — a shabby room in an East Side boarding-house with a mantel-piece supplied with many knick-knacks which were marvelously selected to reveal the nature of the man who owned them. The duality of mood which dominates the whole play of *The Witch*, which was presented at the New Theatre, is indicated at the

outset by the stage-set of the first act. This set exhibits a forlorn and barren landscape punctuated in the foreground by an apple-tree in full blossom; and the aspect of the setting suggests at once the general atmosphere of grave and gray New England which permeates the play, relieved only by the single florid figure of the young, impassioned heroine.

The third, and perhaps the most important, pre-occupation of the modern scenic artist is to devise a set within which the natural grouping of the actors at every moment of the play will arrange itself in conformity with the laws of pictorial composition. The leading lines of the stage picture should converge on certain points which may be utilized in the most important business of the act. In this exigency, which is similar to that which is submitted to by every master of graphic composition, the scenic artist is aided greatly by his ability to effect a mechanical focus of light upon any selected detail of his stage picture. Except in scenes imagined to progress in the full, unchanging light of noon, he may emphasize one section or another of the stage by the deft employment of electric lights. But, whenever this recourse to mechanics is denied him, he may accomplish his effect of emphasis by the graphic expedient of converging lines.

It should be evident from these notes that the

new art of designing stage scenery is very intricate and difficult, but that it offers possibilities for pictorial appeal which as yet have hardly been completely realized. The advantages of being permitted to render a picture in three dimensions instead of one, and of being allowed to alter the lighting of the picture almost at will, afford the followers of the new art obvious opportunities which are denied the ordinary painter; but the attendant difficulties of the art are great, because of the threefold limitation to which the scenic artist must evermore submit.

III

THE DECORATIVE DRAMA

BOTH in painting and in sculpture, the decorative artist labors under limitations more precisely technical than those which are imposed upon his freer fellow-craftsmen. A decorative painting must fit the room that it is destined to adorn; and, to this end, its mere patterning of lines and colors becomes more important than the subject it sets forth. A decorative bit of sculpture must be molded in reference to the general architectural design of which it is a mere detail; and it cannot be judged by the same standards that we apply to the appreciation of a statue modeled by and for itself.

In the exercise of every art there are two steps, — first, a selection of details from nature, and second, an arrangement of the details selected, in accordance with a pattern. To the ordinary painter, the ordinary sculptor, the first of these steps is the more important of the two; and his work will interest us mainly on account of the details he has decided to select from nature. But to the decorative artist, the pattern is of prime

importance: it scarcely matters what details he chooses to exhibit, so long as he arranges them in accordance with a satisfying scheme.

The ordinary painting must tell us something about life: if it be a portrait, it must exhibit the painter's appreciation of a person; if it be a landscape, it must exhibit his appreciation of some phase of out-of-doors; but the decorative painting may deal with either cabbages or kings, without expressing any sympathy with either, provided that the motive be developed in a composition that shall be harmonious in itself and appropriate in line and color to the room that it completes. The same distinction holds in sculpture. If any single figure in that serried rank of kings that is strung across the façade of Notre Dame de Paris were taken down from its niche and set up on a pedestal, it would look abnormally tall and slender, and curiously cramped; because, like any ordinary statue, it would then be set in competition with nature. But, in its proper place, the figure is not intended to compete with nature: it is intended merely to continue, and not disrupt, a pattern that covers the face of an entire building.

It will be seen that the art of decoration is, of all the arts, the most removed from nature. It is the one art in which the subject-matter is of very small account and the technical presentment is of overwhelming importance. An egg is not an

interesting object, and neither is a dart; but the egg-and-dart molding that the Greeks developed is so superbly decorative that it has held its own, against all attempts at innovation, throughout immemorable centuries. In decoration, art is exercised solely for the sake of art. The decorative painter values lines and colors, the decorative sculptor values forms and shadows, utterly for their own sakes, without particular reference to the objects which happen to furnish them to his hand. But the ordinary painter, the ordinary sculptor, works with his eye upon the object: the object interests him in and for itself, and he marshals technical details merely to minister to his purpose to render the thing as he sees it.

A good painting, a good statue, awakens us to a realization of life; but a good decoration relieves us from such a realization. Paintings and statues assert the importance of nature; but decorations assert the importance of art. The painter and the sculptor ask us to admire a subject; but the decorator asks us to admire a pattern.

If, with this distinction in our minds, we compare the contributions of Puvis de Chavannes and Edwin A. Abbey to the walls of the Boston Public Library, we shall see that the Frenchman excels from the decorative standpoint and that the American excels from the pictorial standpoint. It is the merit of the panels of Puvis that they melt

into the surrounding marble and refuse to arrest the transitory eye by reminding it of life. The mild and misty colors, the conventional and un-insistent outlines, abstain from capturing attention to the subjects that are touched upon; and the wanderer comes away, remembering that he has climbed a lovely stairway but forgetting that he has paused to look at pictures. But Abbey's Tennysonian narrative of the legend of Sir Galahad attracts attention to itself, reminds the loiterer of life, and makes him utterly forget that he is in a building. It disrupts the room that it was meant to decorate, by rendering the observer impatient of a roof. From the technical standpoint, it spoils the room by sweeping it away.

Readers of these pages do not need to be again reminded that the drama, in this modern age, has tended to become more visual than auditory in its medium of appeal, and has allied itself, in recent years, more with the art of painting than with the art of literature. Ever since the adoption of the picture-frame proscenium, the prevalent and customary play has been pictorial. But very recently it has occurred to certain producers to go a step further and to handle the drama not merely as a series of pictures, but, finally, as a series of decorations. That interesting, inconsistent theorist, Mr. Gordon Craig, is one of the leaders of

this movement; but its most successful practical exponent has been Professor Max Reinhardt of Berlin.

Professor Reinhardt at the present time [he began his career in conformity with other theories] conceives an acted play as a bit of decoration. He does not desire that a drama should offer a judgment or a criticism of life: he desires, rather, that it should offer a continuously seductive pattern of lines and colors, forms and shadows, to the eye. In his present view, the drama should not, like a picture, compete with nature by awakening the spectator to a realization of life: it should, rather, like a decoration, satisfy the spectator by an utterly esthetic patterning of visual details. Whereas, in recent years, the majority of our theatric artists have been striving to return to nature, Professor Reinhardt is now endeavoring to get away from it. He does not ask us to be interested primarily in life: he asks us to be interested primarily in art.

This consideration should be borne in mind in any criticism of the pantomime of *Sumurûn*, which has recently been represented in America. This production of Professor Reinhardt's may be taken as a type of the Decorative Drama; and it should, properly, be appreciated by some critic of the decorative arts instead of by a critic of

the theatre. By divesting the drama of the spoken word, Professor Reinhardt has removed it from the realm of literature and bereaved it of any reference to actuality: he has conceived it, rather, as a continuous frieze of flitting, ever fluctuating, decorations.

A glance at any scene in *Sumurân* indicated that this Oriental panorama should be judged less as drama than as painting, and less as painting than as decoration. The stage-pictures were rendered in that particular style of secessionistic artistry that is popularly known in Germany as the *Jugend-Stil*. It gets its name from the fact that, although the original inspiration came from Paris, it became most popular in Germany through the work of a clever group of artists illustrating the satirical magazines, *Jugend* and *Simplicissimus*. They made it an effective fashion for all decorative purposes. They found that flat backgrounds, utterly lacking in perspective, that striking outlines and solid blocks of color [they favored Egyptian angles for the rendering of figures], served particularly well for poster and cartoon work, — for work, in other words, in which an idea had to be impressed in an instant on the spectator, even in the most careless glance, so emphatically that it should remain for some time in his memory. This method — a method devised, in the first instance, for the adornment of naga-

zine covers — Professor Reinhardt has adopted for the uses of the Decorative Drama.

He divests his backgrounds of perspective lines, and renders them in monochrome. In consequence, they stop the eye, and fling into vivid relief the costumes of the actors. These costumes are designed not as dresses, in reference to life, but as blocks of color, in reference to art; and the colors are simple in themselves and harmonious with one another. The method of the entire decoration is impressionistic. It proceeds by the suppression of details, and by the arrangement of the very few details selected, in accordance with a pattern of conventional simplicity. The lighting of the stage is emphatically simple. In the scene of the Sheik's bed-chamber, which may be taken as typical, there are only two light-values, — a lantern at the head of the stairway, and a streaming light cast down funnel-wise over the bed of the Sheik. The most impressive scene of the entire play is a mere procession of all the characters across the stage, before a blank wall of unobtrusive gray, above which is seen a black palace, drawn, without perspective, upon a sky of slate.

The drama thus exhibited as decoration tells in pantomime two distinct but intricately intertangled stories, accompanied by interpretative music patterned, in post-Wagnerian fashion, out

of the intermingling of appropriate "leading motives." It is unnecessary, in this consideration, to summarize either of these narratives. Both of them are inevitably violent, since they must tell themselves immediately to the eye without the aid of words. The passion of love must express itself in lust, the passion of revenge must express itself in murder, the mood of humor must express itself in physical buffoonery, in a narrative that is conceived as decoration.

In America, the subject-matter of *Sumurûn* seems to have astounded a certain section of the public [and even a certain number of the newspaper reviewers] by its absolute divorce from all morality. It is, of course, unimaginable that a decoration should be either moral or immoral. A mere pattern of lines and colors suggests no logical association with life; and it is only in the sphere of life that a distinction between morality and immorality can have any pertinence. In life, for instance, murder is indubitably an immoral occupation; but if a decorative artist, desiring merely a splash of red to complete a color-composition, should choose to represent a murdered man dripping the harmless necessary pool of blood, it would be illogical to accuse him of immorality. Such an art as decoration, which has nothing to do with life, must not be judged in terms of life; and *Sumurûn*, though lust and

murder run rampant through its decorative narrative, is no more immoral than the egg-and-dart molding that adorns the buildings of the world. To conceive such decoration as immoral is to confess a lack of culture.

IV

THE DRAMA OF ILLUSION

It is proverbial that the average person will believe the evidence of his eyes more readily than the evidence of his ears. Beneath that sage and cogent phrase of current slang, "You'll have to show me," there lurks indeed a psychologic law. A man may doubt what you have merely told him; but he is much less likely to doubt what he himself has seen. For this reason, those arts which make their appeal to the eye, like painting and sculpture, are more convincing to the average person than those which make their appeal to the ear, like poetry and music. If I say, in terms of the ungraphic art of prose, "I have seen the most beautiful woman in the world; she is, indeed, the perfect woman," — even if I ascend upon the wings of words and call her, with the eloquence of Alfred Noyes, the "white culmination of the dreams of earth," — I shall leave the average reader cold; but if I could lead the reader to that tiny room in Paris where the armless, radiant wonder leans a little backward through the air, and looks forth, illimitably serene,

over the heads of the noisy and nervous visitors that swarm around, all impotent to interrupt her utter and divine quiescence, the reader would indeed believe me, — conquered beyond question by the evidence of his eyes.

The drama is a compound art, in that it appeals simultaneously to the eye and to the ear: it is at once an auditory art, like poetry and music, and a visual art, like painting and sculpture. But, in different ages of the drama, the proportion to each other of these two appeals — the auditory and the visual — has been adjusted variously. If we review, with a single sudden sweep of mind, the whole history of the dramatic art, we shall see that the drama began by being principally auditory, and that it has grown more and more visual from age to age, until to-day, for the first time, it makes its appeal mainly to the eye. Beneath this evolution we shall notice, as its motive, a constant and continual striving of the drama for more absolute, unquestionable credence. *Æschylus* was striving to make you credit what he told you: *Pinero* is striving to make you credit what you see. The latter task, as we already have observed, is psychologically simpler; and therefore it is evident that the drama has gained conviction by the change.

There is a certain profit in speculating as to whether, in attending the performance of a typical

play of any chosen epoch, it would have been more or less disadvantageous to be blind or to be deaf. For instance, it becomes evident that a blind person would have lost comparatively little in the theatre of Dionysus but would lose comparatively much in the Belasco Theatre; whereas a deaf person would be able to follow the performance of *The Return of Peter Grimm*, but would not have been able to follow the performance of *Ædipus King*. Owing to the conditions of its representment, the Greek drama was required to rely principally on its appeal to the ear. In a theatre so open and so spacious there could be no facial expression, no intimate and delicate gesticulation. The movements of the three actors were necessarily conventional and sculpturesque; the evolutions of the chorus were necessarily formal and measured. Conviction had to be conveyed by eloquence of speech, in poetry large and luminous and overwhelming; and an author, to succeed as a dramatist, had to be a master of sea-surgings in the medium of verse. The great Elizabethan drama, as represented to us in the works of Shakespeare, thrilled and trembled at the parting of the ways. It was a drama devoid of any particularity of visual appeal, set without scenery on a bare platform, and played by actors surrounded on three sides by a public practised more in listening than in looking. Yet it is

evident that Shakespeare, more than any of his fellows, felt keenly the influence of time and place on character and action; for, unlike the Greeks, he strove continually to make his auditors *see* — with that subtle sense that Hamlet called the “mind’s eye” — the particular environment of place and time in which his action was imagined to occur. Since his theatre was not equipped to present this environment directly to the eye, he was required to force his auditors to imagine it by hurling into their ears descriptive passages so potent in visual suggestion as to require them to seem to see what, actually, they had only heard. What Shakespeare chiefly stood in need of — if we consider him, for the moment, solely as what we now call a “producer” of plays — was a direct, unmetaphorical medium for the expression of his visual imagination.

Such a medium is offered by the modern stage; and the invention of this medium has had, thus far, two different results.

Late in the nineteenth century, the newly devised equipment of the theatre to represent the look of actuality contributed, for the moment, to the spread of realism in the drama. Realism had already long been rampant in the other arts of narrative, and now it was at last enabled to broaden its dominion to include the stage. The drama was immediately dominated by a zest for

imitating actuality: it strove to represent the very look of life, and to force the spectator to induce that desirable and necessary sense of truth which is the end of art, from the contemplation of a selected and arranged assortment of familiar facts. But very recently the drama, weary at last of imitating actuality, has begun to strive to use the modern mechanical medium of concreteness to convey ideas essentially abstract, and is trying at last to employ the modern mastery of visual suggestion to convey a sense of the invisible. Ten or twenty years ago, our playwrights strove only to make their spectators believe what they saw before them on the stage: but now our playwrights strive, by visual suggestion, to make their spectators imagine much more than what they actually see. Paradoxical as it might seem to a merely aloof and theoretic contemplation, the mechanical and concrete particularity of the contemporary stage has begun to minister to the rise of a new mysticism in the drama, — a mysticism which, for the present, finds its fullest expression in that morning-star of the new era of romance and poetry which seems destined soon to overwhelm the drama, — the elusive and imaginative Maeterlinck. In *Sister Beatrice*, for instance, M. Maeterlinck, being an author of this present age, relies frankly on the harmonious collaboration of the designer of scenery and costumes, the stage-

director, and (most of all) the electrician of the theatre, for the complete conveyance of his imagined and designed effect: but, by means of all these marshaled media for visual suggestion, he contrives to lure the spectator airily aloft to a region where he wings his way among invisibilities.

We may regard it as the ultimate and utter triumph of the Drama of Illusion that, precisely because its medium of expression is more concrete, it is better endowed than the drama of any other age to symbolize ideas that are essentially abstract. By mastering the means of visual representation, the drama has learned at last to embody, vividly and convincingly, a sense of the invisible. This is an artistic triumph that was difficult for Sophocles and Shakespeare, but which — owing to the physical evolution of the theatre — is comparatively easy for M. Maeterlinck. Granted the great advantage of the mechanical equipment of the modern stage, a man of comparatively small imagination may make the public see more, and in consequence believe more, than many a giant of imagination in an age of the merely auditory drama. No one, for example, would believe the story of *The Return of Peter Grimm* if you merely told it to him, even if you told it in language as eloquent as that of Sophocles or Shakespeare; but Mr. David Belasco

easily compels from his spectators an artistic credence of his play — during the brief period, at least, while they are watching it — by the mechanical, but none the less enthralling, expedient of forcing them to believe the evidence of their eyes.

Considered as a literary composition, *The Return of Peter Grimm* does not offer any notable elucidation of life, nor does it even embody an especially imaginative searching of the mystery of death; but considered as a fabric for the theatre, it offers a very remarkable instance of the technical triumph of the Drama of Illusion, — the most remarkable, in fact, that has been set before our eyes in recent years. It conveys with absolute concreteness an idea that is essentially abstract; and it succeeds, by a mastery of visualization, in convincing the spectator that he is seeing the invisible.

The play is designed to embody that spiritistic theory of the persistence of personal energy after death which, in recent years, has been deemed worthy of thorough scientific investigation by the Society for Psychical Research. According to this theory, the liberated soul retains its human individuality, and, hovering regretfully about the scenes of its foregone activities on earth, strives to communicate, through the entranced minds of spiritistic mediums, with its former relatives and

friends. The accumulated scientific evidence in support of this hypothesis, in spite of its vasty bulk, is utterly unsatisfactory; and looked at *a priori*, the theory seems extremely unimaginative. The maintenance of human individuality after bodily death has never yet been proved in all the centuries of searching, even though it has been assumed as an axiom in many of the great religions of the world; but even if we accept it as a fact, it would be pitifully unimaginative to assume that a soul set free by death to range the boundless universe should still be tethered to that twirling inconsiderable grain of dust we call our world, — that a soul at last enfranchised to illimitable possibilities of experience should find no loftier application for its energies than to try to talk in human terms, about temporal trivialities, with souls still body-bound and anchored to the earth.

This is neither the time nor the place for a detailed philosophic argument against the spiritistic theory; and my present purpose is merely to indicate that the thesis which Mr. Belasco has selected as the basis of his play, — though it seems to appeal to many minds at present and is often popularly dallied with, — is by no means easy to believe. All the more remarkable, therefore, as a technical triumph of the Drama of Illusion, is the fact that Mr. Belasco succeeds in compelling an

artistic acceptance of the thesis throughout the presentation of his play. And there is no denying that he does succeed. Mainly by his mastery of the subtle art of lighting, he lays siege to the emotions of the spectator and conquers credence for his story. The eye is captivated by an overwhelming visual illusion. At no previous period in the history of the drama could such a play have been successfully produced; and it deserves to be studied as a signal triumph of the modern visual art of stage-direction.

V

THE MODERN ART OF STAGE-DIRECTION

I

THE acted drama is a compound work of art, exhibiting a coördination of the labors of several different artists, each of whom employs his own distinct medium of expression. Thus, in this multifarious modern age, a single acted play may call into conjunction the diverse arts of writing, acting, dancing, painting, sculpture, decoration, music, and illustrative illumination; and the artist who supplies any of these separate elements to the general and finished fabric may be ignorant of the methods of his fellow-laborers. No one man, unaided, can accomplish the entire work; and yet, if the final product is to be worthy of the name of art, some individual among these many and diverse collaborators must be singled out and made finally responsible for the appeal of the acted drama as a whole.

The drama has altered its complexion from age to age, according as one or another of these associated artists has been set in supreme command,

to the subordination of his fellow-craftsmen. Until the present age, the captaincy has always fallen either to the author or to the actor, and the other artists have always been subservient to these. In reviewing the history of the drama from the earliest times until our own, we might easily divide it into literary periods and histrionic periods, according as the author or the actor has, for the moment, assumed dominion over it. A curious and interesting point is that the periods of great authors and the periods of great actors have never coincided. Whenever the artist of one type has been supreme, the artist of the other type has been (necessarily, it would seem in retrospect) merely a contributory functionary.

History, which has engraved on granite the names of the authors of the great Greek tragedies, has told us next to nothing of their actors. The two actors employed by Æschylus, the three employed by Sophocles, were granted very little opportunity for the exploitation of themselves. Their masks robbed them of the personal appeal of facial expression; their stilted boots inhibited any movements except those which were conventionally plastic; and all that was left to them was to give voice to the commentary of the poet on a national and familiar fable. The evolutions of the chorus must have offered scope for the contributions of a master of the allied arts of sculpture

and the dance; but the primary and all-important appeal of the drama was invested in the lines. If the verse were spoken audibly and read with dignity, the play would have its chance; and its success or failure depended almost solely on the prowess of the author. Sophocles and Euripides could win prizes by themselves, without any indispensable assistance from a collaborating actor.

Again, in the Elizabethan period, the appeal of the acted drama depended mainly on the author. History has recorded reverently the names of innumerable writers of that spacious age, but has deleted from recollection the names of all but the very foremost actors. Alleyn and Burbage are remembered; but, with the fullest data bequeathed to us by contemporary commentators, it is impossible for us to publish the entire cast of any play of Shakespeare's. The reason is that, in the Elizabethan period, the lines themselves were immeasurably more important than any speaker of them, and the actor was regarded only as a secondary, and comparatively unimportant, artist.

But when, a little later in history, we turn our attention to the records of great actors, we perceive (with a little wonderment at first) that they have flourished only in periods when dramatic authorship has been at a very low ebb. Betterton is the first great tragic actor of whom we read in the records of the English stage; and he ruled

the theatre at a time when (if we except the two masterpieces of Otway) the authorship of tragedy had sunk beneath contempt. Garrick, the greatest actor that the English stage remembers, flourished in an age when tragedy was absolutely sterile and when comedy had paused to catch its breath in mid-transition from Congreve to Sheridan. He played *King Lear* with a fabricated happy ending, and made his last appearance on the stage in a comedy by the now forgotten Mrs. Centlivre. Later, when Sheridan begins to write, we hear a great deal of him and very little of his actors; and still later, in the early nineteenth century, when dramatic authorship dived downward to the lowest point that it has ever touched in England, we observe (in reminiscence) a great galaxy of actors, — Kean, and the Kembles, and Mrs. Siddons, and Macready.

The obvious deduction from this summary historical review appears to be that the theatre-going public will pay its money for only one thing at a time, — either to hear what an author has to say, or to see an actor act; and that it has never supported the theatre to receive both of these distinct impressions simultaneously and equally. Thus, in a retrospective view of history, we perceive a subsistent antagonism between the author and the actor which has always been contrary to the highest theory of the acted drama.

This unfortunate antagonism may be observed, at nearer view, in the records of the nineteenth century. Throughout the first three-quarters of that most recent of completed cycles, the actor reigned supreme; but (somewhat suddenly) in the last quarter, he resigned his supremacy to some other of his collaborative artists. The period that the veteran critic, Mr. William Winter, remembers with such pathetic eloquence in his backward-looking books was a period of memorable actors; and this (according to our logic) is only another way of saying that, at that time, there were no authors of any consequence. The public was equally interested in the art of Edwin Booth, whether he was presenting a supreme play like *Othello* or a rhetorical and imitative play like *Richelieu*, whether he was acting a great part like Hamlet or an artificial part like Bertuccio. Shakespeare, Bulwer-Lytton, Tom Taylor, looked alike to the admirers of this matchless actor. But, in studying a later and more literary age, we re-read *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and forget Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and we perceive that *Mrs. Dane's Defence* is a very well-made play without recalling that Miss Lena Ashwell is an artificial actress.

The most recent shift of emphasis from the drama of the actor to the drama of the author has occurred within the recollection of theatre-goers

only thirty years of age; and the greatest British actor and the greatest American actor of recent times belonged to the age that now is past and finished, instead of to the age that now seems blossoming around us. There can scarcely be a doubt that Sir Henry Irving and Mr. Richard Mansfield were the greatest actors of recent times in England and America; and yet neither of them did anything at all to further what Mr. Henry Arthur Jones has aptly termed the "Renascence of the English Drama" in our days. They made their great successes, for the most part, in inconsiderable plays, like *The Bells* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Irving never presented a play by Pinero or Jones, — the foremost authors among his contemporary countrymen; and Mansfield never presented a play by any considerable American author, — if we except *Beau Brummel*, by the youthful Clyde Fitch, a piece in which its author's special gifts could scarcely be made manifest. Irving rejected *Michael and His Lost Angel* (by far the greatest play that Mr. Jones has written, and one of the best plays of this modern age), although it contained two admirable parts precisely suited to himself and to Miss Terry, — for the reason, apparently, that he could endure, in his immediate vicinity, no playwright who really counted as an author. Mansfield followed out a similar career, — giving great performances in

bad plays by secondary writers, and centering attention always on himself.

But, most recently of all, the drama has taken a new turning, as a result of which the prime responsibility is shouldered no longer either on the actor or on the author, but on a new and very interesting functionary, — the stage-director. This functionary, who has appeared only lately in the history of the theatre, has already, in many instances, assumed dominion over both the author and the actor, and bids fair, in the age that is immediately to come, to be the supreme leader of the acted drama. To this new artist — the stage-director — and to his special art, we must therefore devote particular attention in the present context.

II

The importance of the stage-director in the drama of to-day is rarely appreciated by the uninitiated theatre-goer. The actor appeals immediately to the eyes of the public, the author appeals immediately to their ears; but the stage-director, whose work has been completed in the period of rehearsal, is never seen in the theatre, and seldom even talked about, after his finished fabric has been offered to the audience. Yet nearly all that is shown upon the stage is the

result of his selection and arrangement, and the credit for a satisfactory performance is often due less to the actors than to him.

It is the business of the stage-director to co-ordinate the work of the author, the actors, the pictorial artists who design the scenery and costumes, the electrician, the musicians, into a single and self-consistent whole. He decides upon the setting and the lighting of each act, selects and arranges the furniture and properties, and works out what is called the "business" of the play. He rehearses the associated actors, and patterns their individual contributions into a balanced and harmonious performance.

His work is analogous to that of the conductor of a modern orchestra, — who, although he plays no instrument himself, coördinates the contributions of a hundred individual performers into an artistic whole, regulating the *tempo* and commanding every variation in the emphasis. Or perhaps we may call attention to a still closer analogy that exists between the stage-director and the manager of a professional baseball team. It is a well-known fact that baseball pennants are won not so much because of the prowess of individual players as because of the crafty handling of a team by the directing manager.

In some instances the manager of a baseball team may be himself one of the participants in the

game; in other instances he may be an ex-player, who has retired from actual exercise; or he may be a student of the game who was never noted as a player on his own account. To return to our analogy — the stage-director may be the author of the play, as in the case of Sir Arthur Pinero or the late Clyde Fitch; he may be the leading actor, as in the case of Sir Henry Irving or Mrs. Fiske; he may be both of these, as in the case of Mr. Granville Barker; he may be a retired actor, like Mr. Henry Miller when he produces a piece in which he plays no part; or he may be some student of the stage who is not known to the public as an individual performer, like Mr. George Foster Platt. The ideal situation is indubitably that in which the functions of author, leading actor, and stage-director are combined in one person, as in the classic case of Molière or in the modern instance of Mr. William Gillette; for the greater the measure of the compound imagining that is concentrated in a single mind, the greater the likelihood of a harmonious result. But in cases where the labor is divided among different people, the final and supreme responsibility, in the contemporary theatre, is vested in the stage-director. At the present time, the actor and the author can escape the domination of the stage-director only by assuming his special functions in addition to their own.

Thus, though in reviewing the history of former ages we may divide it into periods of the author's dominance, and periods of the actor's dominance, we must define the present age as a period of the dominance of the stage-director. This all-important functionary has only recently been evolved, to cope with the complexity of our modern Drama of Illusion. We are told by historians of music that in the seventeenth century there was no such thing as a conductor for an orchestra: one of the associated players, while performing on an instrument himself, merely set the *tempo* for his fellow-artists. Similarly, in the early history of baseball, the conduct of games depended almost entirely on the physical skill of individual contestants: it was only later in the evolution of the sport that such managerial expedients as the sacrifice hit, the hit and run, the squeeze play, and the double steal, came to be ordered, by hidden signals, from the bench. The problem of the contemporary theatre, for the first time in the history of the drama, is a problem of team-play, in which the contributions of the individual artists must be studiously subordinated to the directing will of a manager, or conductor, of the stage.

In their own periods people went to hear Shakespeare or went to see Garrick; and neither at the Globe Theatre nor at Drury Lane was a

stage-director thought of. But in New York, at the present day, people often flock to the theatre, not so much to listen to the author or to observe the actors, as to enjoy (to single out our most emphatic instance) the stage-direction of Mr. David Belasco, — who rarely writes any of his plays and never acts in them.

III

It is not surprising that the history of stage-direction in the last thirty years has been the history of a return to nature. Never before has the theatre approached our present-day success in holding up the mirror to contemporary life. The plays of Mr. Granville Barker, who stage-directs his own productions as author and as actor, reflect the very look of daily life; and it seems safe to assert that the modern art of stage-direction has carried realism to its ultimate achievement in the art of drama.

Let us admit this as the special triumph of the last thirty years of the theatre. But the very merits of our realistic stage-direction at its best carry with them certain concomitant defects. Our pursuit of actuality has lured us aloof from that eternal race wherein the greatest athletes among artists pass onward, in relays, the torch of truth. Our eagerness to record the temporary fact has

blinded us a little to the vision of the perennial, recurrent generality. We set forth plays that have the very look of here and now, instead of revealing intimations of immortality.

The most obvious errors of the realistic art of stage-direction (and each of these, of course, is closely related to a merit and a triumph) are three in number. First, by its insistence on details, it disperses and distracts the attention of the audience; secondly, it imposes an unnecessary and unfortunate expense upon the business-manager of the production; and thirdly, it is, in the highest sense, inartistic, because it is unimaginative. Each of these objections may be illustrated in detail.

Our stage-direction is meritorious mainly because of the carefulness and thoroughness with which we reproduce the facts of nature; and it is erroneous mainly because of our too sedulous insistence on details. Mr. David Belasco may be selected, in America, as an exponent of the current art of stage-direction at its best. It takes him nearly two years to work up the scenical investiture of each of his productions; and, when at last he lifts his curtain, he lifts it on a glimpse of life. His only error is a tendency to diseconomize attention by forcing the spectator to look at several hundred interesting details, instead of summarizing these details in an impressionistic picture that

should suggest at once, and in a single glance, the mood of the action that is to be exhibited. The one room in which the entire story of *The Return of Peter Grimm* is unfolded is extremely beautiful and aptly suited to the story; but the setting is too crowded with details, and the effect of the narrative would be made more simple, and therefore more emphatic, if half a hundred interesting objects were deleted from the picture. When, for instance, an entrance door [right forward] is opened to admit an actor, it reveals a vista of a fully furnished dining-room [off-stage] that is decorated with innumerable objects that attract the eye. Hence the attention of the spectator enters the dining-room at once, and stays there, even though some necessary business of the play is being enacted in the main room on the stage.

Our present avidity for the agglomeration of innumerable accurate details has increased, beyond any reasonable necessity, the expense of the average theatrical production; and this is a very unfortunate thing for the art of the drama, because it tends to make our managers more tremulous in considering the possible production of a meritorious work that may not appeal to great numbers of the public. A few years ago, Mr. George C. Tyler published a magazine article in which he complained that, whereas in 1897 the public was satisfied with a production that cost

only one thousand dollars, it demanded in 1911 a production that cost seventy-five thousand dollars, —a new insistence that made the career of the producing manager exceedingly precarious at the present day. The answer is that this insistence has not been made spontaneously by the theatre-going public, but has been stimulated artificially by the managers themselves. The particular production that Mr. Tyler had in mind, at the time he wrote this article, was his own recent production of *The Garden of Allah*. At the present date it is unnecessary to insist that *The Garden of Allah*, considered as a dramatic composition, was not worthy of the expenditure of even a thousand dollars; for all the real camels and imported Arabs and mechanical sandstorms in the world could not lift it into living. In other words — to look at the matter from the standpoint of art — Mr. Tyler wantonly wasted seventy-five thousand dollars in working out, in careful and complete detail, an investiture for a dramatic fabric that was worthless in itself.

Yet it cannot be denied that the success of many genuine and worthy plays is jeopardized by the fact that, under the conditions that exist at present, it costs too much to put them on the stage. In recent years Mr. Belasco has required his playwrights to unfold their stories in a single set whenever possible, and at the utmost to shift

the scene of the action only once. Thus, for merely economic reasons, he now imposes on the drama an observance of the so-called Unity of Place, which the efforts of the best practitioners of other ages have proved to be an undesirable ideal.

It is obvious that, if the art of the drama is to be allowed to develop freely, our stage-directors must devise some method of decreasing the expense of the average production. And evidently the only thing that can be done is to lessen our present insistence on accurate details, and to invent some summary and more imaginative method for projecting our stories on the stage.

For, finally, the main demerit of our current art of stage-direction is the fact that, though admirably photographic, it is utterly unimaginative. It costs a great deal to make the moon rise on the modern stage, because we invent an artifice that is a marvel of mechanical dexterity; but it cost Shakespeare nothing to make his audience imagine a moon-rise at the opening of the last act of *The Merchant of Venice*. And Shakespeare's method, even for the modern theatre, remains the better of the two. The most enjoyable experience in life is the easy exercise of one's own mind; and the spectators in the theatre will enjoy themselves in proportion as their minds are called easily into activity by the spectacle that is presented to them.

The stage-director should therefore study not so much how he may accomplish the creative work himself as how he may contrive to make the audience accomplish it during the two hours' traffic of the stage. There is no advantage in setting half of Rome upon the boards to listen to Marc Antony's oration, if, with a mere handful of supernumeraries, the stage-director can make the audience imagine that half of Rome is present. We have carried the contemporary photographic method to its uttermost development: a change is obviously needed: and it is apparent that the next turn that the art of the theatre must take is a turn toward more imaginative stage-direction.

IV

The stage-direction of the immediate future has already cast its light before it. Already three thoroughly practicable remedies have been suggested for the three evils that have been enumerated. Professor Max Reinhardt, of Berlin, has shown us how we may obtain relief from the insistence on details; the Irish Players have shown us how to save money wisely in the preparation of productions; and Mr. Gordon Craig has shown us in his practice (and endeavored, somewhat vainly, to teach us in his theory) how we may turn the theatre to more imaginative uses.

It was very instructive, recently, to compare the production of *Kismet* — which was put on, according to our customary photographic method, by one of our best American stage-directors, Mr. Harrison Grey Fiske — with Professor Reinhardt's production of *Sumurûn*. Both of these plays told fantastic Oriental stories imitated from the *Arabian Nights*; but the methods of production were diametrically dissimilar. *Kismet* was made beautiful by the elaboration of details; but *Sumurûn* was made beautiful by the suppression of details. Mr. Fiske's method was to multiply effects; but Professor Reinhardt's method was to simplify them. Much of his scenery was deliberately crude. There was, for instance, a pink palace with wobbly little windows that looked as if a child had painted it playfully in a picture-book. *Kismet* was localized, with archæological accuracy, in the Baghdad of a thousand years ago, and was consistently Arabian; but *Sumurûn* displayed a careful lack of localization in either place or time. Some of the costumes suggested Turkey, others Persia or Arabia, others China or Japan; and there was no possible means of guessing at any definite date for the story. The architecture belonged to no country and to no age; it was merely fantastically Oriental. Throughout the whole production the truth was impressed upon the eye that the Orient of *Sumurûn* was

an Orient of dream; and the setting had no anchorage in actuality.

The second problem — the problem of expense — has been coped with practically by the Irish Players. These associated lovers of the drama carry with them an extensive repertory, and they cannot afford to spend any considerable sum of money on the investiture of any of their plays; but they have successfully surmounted this economic difficulty by casting emphasis, not on the scenery and properties, but on the reading of the lines and on the lighting of the stage. When they present a play of Synge's, they let the author do the work, by reading with undisrupted fluency the long roll of his rhythm. At other times they contrive to decorate a scarcely furnished stage by a deft manipulation of their lighting. *Birthright*, for instance, is set in a homely cottage, with only a few necessary bits of furniture and scarcely any properties. There is a fireplace [left forward], and a staircase leading off-stage to the right. The set is very shallow. The back discloses a blank, bare wall, interrupted only by a window and a door. Not a single picture is hung upon this surface of dingy plaster. But the footlights are suppressed. The stage is lighted only by the fire-light, a candle on the table, and some unindicated illumination in the flies. The result is that the actors, as they move about, cast huge and varying

MODERN ART OF STAGE-DIRECTION 61

shadows over the bare surface of the wall and decorate it continuously with fluctuating and impressive designs. Again, in *The Rising of the Moon*, the footlights are suppressed, and the stage is lighted only by two streams of apparent moonlight which come to a focus at a large barrel in the centre, on which the two most important actors seat themselves, — while the wharf and the water in the background are merely imagined in a darkness that is inscrutable and alluringly mysterious. In these two instances, the Irish Players contrived to set their stage with rare imaginative effectiveness, without any expenditure of money whatsoever.

v

One of the leaders of the new movement toward a more imaginative handling of the stage is Mr. Gordon Craig. Mr. Craig has toiled for many years as a designer of costumes, scenery, and properties; he has tried experiments in the delicate art of lighting the stage; and he has made a few productions, in various European capitals, which have been very favorably received. He has been regarded by many critics as a salutary idealist, and has been hailed by a few as the prophet of a new era in the theatre. Meanwhile, he has exhibited his designs — all of which are odd and many of which are interesting — and has talked

a great deal, in those rapt, ecstatic, and indecipherable terms that unduly impress the uninitiated.

Mr. Craig refuses to regard the drama either as a department of literature or as a department of pictorial art. He regards it as a distinct and independent artistic evocation, of which the elements are action, words, line, color, and rhythm. He considers the stage-director as inevitably the ultimate, supreme commander of the collaboration required by this compound art. All of this is sane enough; but he then proceeds to deify the stage-director. He even goes so far as to express a desire to abolish both the author and the actor in order that the stage-director may not be hampered by any intermediary artists in the expression of his imaginative ideas. Mr. Craig would supplant the actor by a perfect, but involuntary, puppet, which he calls by the hybrid and horrific term of *Uber-Marionette*; and by a company of these puppets he would have the drama acted without words. Thereby he would cast preponderant emphasis upon the scenery and lighting, and would make the drama only an exercise in stage-direction. It is hardly necessary to remark that this idea is mad.

But Mr. Craig has recently made a production of *Hamlet* in the Art Theatre of Moscow; and the accounts of this production are much more

MODERN ART OF STAGE-DIRECTION 63

worthy of studious consideration than any of his abstract theories. Let us consider the following passage from a report in the *London Times* for January 12, 1912:

Every scene in the *Hamlet* has for its foundation an arrangement of screens which rise to the full height of the proscenium, and consist of plain panels devoid of any decoration. Only two colors are used—a neutral cream shade and gold. A complete change of scene is created simply by the rearrangement of these screens, whose value lies, of course, not so much in themselves, as in their formation and the lighting. Mr. Craig has the singular power of carrying the spiritual significance of words and dramatic situations beyond the actor to the scene in which he moves. By the simplest of means he is able, in some mysterious way, to evoke almost any sensation of time or space, the scenes even in themselves suggesting variation of human emotion.

Take, for example, the Queen's chamber in the Castle of Elsinore. Like all the other scenes, it is simply an arrangement of the screens already mentioned. There is nothing which definitely represents a castle, still less the locality or period; and yet no one would hesitate as to its significance—and why? Because it is the spiritual symbol of such a room. A symbol, moreover, whose form is wholly dependent upon the action which it surrounds; every line, every space of light and shadow, going directly to heighten and amplify the significance of that action, and becoming thereby something more than its mere setting—a vital and component part no longer separable from the whole.

All of this is extremely interesting—though we may wish that the correspondent of the *Times* had been a little more explicit in elucidating pre-

cisely how Mr. Craig's arrangement of monochromatic screens became the "spiritual symbol of a room." One point is clear: and that is that Mr. Craig has apparently succeeded in suppressing all superfluous details, in diminishing considerably the expenditure of the producing manager, and in forcing the audience to create in imagination the most telling features of the investiture of the play. In doing this he has pointed the way toward a new manipulation of the exercise of stage-direction, which is more laudatory than the manifestations of this difficult art which are commonly current in the theatre of to-day.

VI

A PLEA FOR A NEW TYPE OF PLAY

I

THE mind of the artist has often been defined as a magic glass through which we look at nature — a sort of lens which brings a chosen phase of life clearly to a focus within a definitely bounded field of vision. With this definition in mind, I should like to ask the reader, at the outset of the present chapter, to lay the book aside in order to perform a simple experiment in optics. Let him step to the nearest window and look for a moment steadily at the house across the street. He will see this house at a certain distance and in a certain degree of detail; and, without turning his head, he will also see, though less distinctly, the three or four houses on either side of the one which he is looking at directly. His field of vision is not definitely bounded but fades off on all sides into a gradually growing dimness; and the aspect of the one house on which his eyes are fixed is entirely natural and not particularly interesting.

Let the reader now procure an ordinary pair

of opera glasses and bring them to a focus on a single window of the house across the street. This window will look much nearer and much larger than before; it will be seen with greater intimacy of detail; and it will appear within a definitely bounded field of vision — composed, as painters say, within a circle, that stops the eye from wandering. These three advantages have been derived from looking through a pair of lenses; but it should be noted also that the observer has suffered an attendant disadvantage — namely that he can no longer look at the entire house, but can merely imagine its total aspect by inference from the appearance of that single little circle which has been so marvelously magnified.

Lastly, let the reader turn the opera glasses about and look at the house through what we are accustomed to call the wrong end of the instrument. Again he will observe a field of vision that is definitely bounded by a circle; but this field of vision will embrace immeasurably more than that which was disclosed by the previous experiment. Instead of seeing only a single window, he will now see the entire house and a segment of each of the adjacent houses; and, because of the clearness of the picture, he will seem to see even more than he noticed with the naked eye. These points must be counted as advantages; but, on the other hand, the house will look much farther

away and will be seen with less distinctness of detail.

This experiment may help us to an understanding of the processes of art. Looking at the house with the naked eye was like observing life without any intermediary aid; but looking at the house through either end of the opera glasses was like observing life through the medium of the artist's mind. In both cases the artificial, or artistic, vision was more interesting than the natural, or actual; and in either case the reason was the same — namely, that the picture was composed and framed within limits that required the absolute attention of the eye, by forbidding it, for the moment, to glance at anything excluded from the field of vision.

But a very different sort of interest was added to the aspect of the house, according as the observer looked through one end or the other of the opera glasses; and this difference offers us a basis for distinguishing the two great processes of art. Employed in the more ordinary way, the glasses afforded a nearer view of a smaller field of vision; and turned about in the less ordinary way, they afforded a more distant view of a larger field of vision. Similarly, there is a sort of art that brings us more intimately into touch with life but shows us less of it at a time; and there is another sort of art that removes life to a greater remote-

ness but shows us more of it at a time. The first type we may call intensive and the second extensive. Intensive art proceeds by amplifying the little, and extensive art proceeds by imagining the large. The one magnifies details, the other minimizes them.

Neither of these processes is absolutely more efficient than the other. Intensive art achieves a finer intimacy of representation, but extensive art achieves a greater range and sweep of treatment. In Venetian painting, for example, the two types may be distinguished in the very different aims and methods of Carpaccio and Tintoretto. Carpaccio is forever asking us to look at some detail of life through a magnifying glass. He is one of the most insinuatingly intimate of artists. He obtrudes a pretty flower or a funny little animal or some wistful fleeting vision of a face to be taken to the heart and loved as, for the moment, the most poignantly interesting object in the world. But Tintoretto has no patience for details. In his great picture of the *Last Judgment*, in the Madonna dell' Orto, he swirls us headlong through the roaring and illimitable vastitudes of space. Appalled amid immensity, we have no use for any magnifying glass: we cry out, rather, for a minifying glass, to render more remote that awful whirring of eternal wings. Carpaccio paints with camel's hair and Tintoretto with a

comet's tail. Which is, finally, the better art? . . . The answer depends on what it is that you are looking for.

The terms "intensive" and "extensive," as applied to art, are comparatively unfamiliar; but they seem to me more useful for the purposes of criticism than such more familiar terms as "realistic" and "romantic," or "prosaic" and "poetic." In nomenclature, as in life, familiarity seems to breed contempt or, at the least, a lack of understanding. A coin too often passed loses the clear image of its minting. Such words as "realistic" and "romantic" have been so often and so loosely used that they have lost all definite significance to the majority of minds. But the new terms "intensive" and "extensive" point to a dichotomy which should be definite and clear, and offer us a sure divining-rod for distinguishing the two great processes of art.

In the light of this distinction, let us consider the present status of the great art of the drama. We shall observe at once that the theatre, in this present period, is given over almost utterly to the practice of intensive art; although, in all preceding periods, it had been assumed without question that the proper province of the theatre was the exhibition of extensive art. The discovery of this essential difference leads us at once to a central point of view, from which we may reason-

ably investigate the special merits and defects of the drama of to-day, in comparison with the dramatic art of other ages.

To make this comparison concrete, let us set one of the best plays of this microscopic modern age beside a couple of the best plays of the spacious age of great Elizabeth. Let us compare the structural method pursued by Sir Arthur Pinero in *The Thunderbolt* with that pursued by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The whole story of *The Thunderbolt* is set forth in three rooms; and, except for the lapse of one month between the first act and the second, the action is entirely continuous. In other words, the narrative is arranged in three distinct pigeon-holes of place and two distinct pigeon-holes of time. But, in setting forth the narrative of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare employed twenty different pigeon-holes of time and place; and, to produce the panoramic effect of *Antony and Cleopatra*, he allowed himself no less than forty-two narrative units, or, as we call them, scenes. The effect of the modern instance is to magnify details; the effect of the Elizabethan is to minify and merge them into a general sense of the drums and trappings of a world-engirdling empire. The modern work diminishes the natural distance between life and the observer, but constricts the limits of the field of vision; whereas the work of Shakespeare

enlarges the limits of the field of vision, but removes life to a more than natural remoteness from the eye of the observer. The merit of either method is the defect of the other. Both Shakespeare and Pinero were asked to cover, in the two hours' traffic of the stage, the same extent of canvas; but the latter filled the picture by amplifying the little and the near, and the former by imagining the large and the remote.

II

It is difficult to estimate the ultimate importance of any big historical development so long as one is living in the midst of it; but it seems safe to assert that, by the historians of future ages, the last thirty years of the development of the drama will be pointed out as especially important because of the unprecedented triumph, in so brief a period, of the methods of intensive art. This development has been defined very clearly by Mr. Henry Arthur Jones in the illuminative preface to his lately published play entitled *The Divine Gift*. This essay is so valuable that I shall take the liberty of quoting the following sentences at length: "For a long generation our realistic drama of modern life has practised an ever-increasing and more severe economy of scene, and action, and dialogue. It tends to deny itself all

trappings and effects but those of ordinary everyday life. It has become an eavesdropping and photographic reporter, taking snapshots and shorthand notes. We may, without intending to depreciate it, call our present convention the eavesdropping convention—the convention which charges playgoers half-a-crown or half-a-guinea for pretending to remove the fourth wall, and pretending to give them an opportunity of spying upon actual life, and seeing everything just as it happens.”

Under what Mr. Jones has happily defined as the “eavesdropping convention,” we have brought nature nearer to the eye than ever before and have vastly magnified the observation of details of daily life; but, at the same time, we should not neglect to notice that, in doing so, we have narrowed the field of vision and have sacrificed that feeling of remoteness which is inseparable from any contemplation of the vast. To offset the gain that is derivable from intimate particularity of observation, we have lost, as Mr. Jones remarks in another passage of the same essay, “the crowded and varied bustle of Shakespeare, the busy hum that comes from his universal workshop, the drums and tramlings of his hundred legions, the long resounding march of assembled humanity as it troops across his boards.”

Though we may feel that the welfare of the

human race requires that some people should be thin and others should be stout, it would be unreasonable for us to ask an individual to grow both thin and stout at the same time. Similarly, it would be unreasonable for us to expect, within a single period, an equally remarkable development of intensive and extensive artistry. It has taken thirty years for the drama to develop its present high efficiency of intensive art. It would be unwise to undervalue this development, which has resulted in the production of many plays which exhibit an extremely high order of intelligence; and we should not be surprised to note the inevitable corollary, that during the same period the excluded method of extensive art has shown no development of any great importance.

But the drama is a democratic art, whose destinies are guided by an almost universal suffrage; and we learn from the history of all democracies that, after a single party has long remained in power, the public is certain, sooner or later, to elect the opposition party into office, in order to give it a chance to show what it can do. The drama cannot remain forever in the hands of the great intensive artists of the present age. Sooner or later the public will demand, if only for the sake of change, a return to the methods of extensive art.

The moment for such a revolution is the mo-

ment when the party in power has finally achieved the utmost of which it is capable. When one method has attained its climax, the only hope of progress lies in changing to another method. There are many indications that the intensive drama of the present period has already reached its zenith and has thereby destroyed its possibilities of future service. For thirty years, as the eavesdropping convention has been more and more improved, the drama has brought us nearer and nearer to actuality, with a constantly increasing magnifying of details and consequent limitation of the field of vision. This development can go no further. Such plays as *The Madras House* and *Hindle Wakes* and *Rutherford and Son* have brought the observer so close to actuality that any further development along the same lines would result in an annihilation of the difference that separates art from life. But this annihilation would be a *reductio ad absurdum*. The drama would retain no reason for existence if it should sacrifice its license of being different from life. In the face of such a danger, there is only one thing to be done. We must at once increase the field of vision by removing the drama to a greater remoteness from actuality.

When the realists threaten to cut their own throats, it is time for us to turn the government over to the romantics. When prose has done its

best, it is time for us to call for poetry. And when the intensive drama can proceed no further with its program without destroying its own excuse for being, the time has come to use the theatre once again for the expression of extensive art.

III

But romance and poetry have been so long excluded from the drama that it will be necessary to invent a new type of play in order to domesticate them in the theatre once again. If Shakespeare were alive to-day, he would find the intensive formula of Pinero unsuited to the exhibition of his own extensive art. The eavesdropping convention has admirably served the purpose of our realistic and prosaic writers; but we cannot impose this convention forever on the writers of a newer age.

What must be the formula for the drama of to-morrow? What Ibsen called "the law of change" indicates that this new drama will be extensive in method, romantic in mood, and poetic in tone; but in what particulars must we revise the technique of the present in order to prepare the theatre for this inevitable change?

First of all, it is obvious that the next generation of dramatic artists will require a freer hand-

ling of the categories of time and place than is possible in the contemporary drama. To the intensive playwright it is clearly an advantage to crowd his narrative into no more than two or three or four distinct pigeon-holes of place and time; but, even in a period when intensive art is dominant, it is manifestly unfair to impose the same formula upon playwrights whose natural tendency is toward a more extensive exercise of art. It is unfair to ask the poetic and romantic M. Maeterlinck to cut his plays according to a pattern that has deliberately been developed to suit the very different requirements of the prosaic and realistic Mr. Stanley Houghton. We need a new dramatic pattern, which shall afford a freer scope to the beating of the large and luminous wings of the extensive artist.

If Shakespeare could arrange his narrative in twenty, or even forty scenes (instead of two or three), why is it impossible for us to do so at the present day? The answer is not theoretical but practical. The Elizabethans used no scenery, in the modern sense; and they could therefore change their time and place by the simple expedient of emptying the stage and repeopling it with other actors. This expedient is denied us by the incubus of modern scenery. We must never for a moment allow ourselves to forget that the development of modern scenery is the one scientific factor which

has made possible the recent wonderful development and impressive triumph of intensive drama; but we must notice, on the other hand, that this same remarkable invention is the sole factor that impedes us from employing the more extensive narrative convention of the Elizabethan stage and exhibiting "the long resounding march of assembled humanity as it troops across the boards."

A person who, although his youth was poor, has learned to live on twenty thousand dollars a year can never easily return to an expenditure of only two thousand dollars a year. Our public has grown so used to the trappings and the suits of scenery that we could not now expect it to accept the sceneless stage of Shakespeare, even for the purpose of allowing to a poet a less impeded flow of narrative. But the use of such scenery as is commonly employed at present entirely prevents the playwright from adopting the remote and easy attitude toward time and place which was accorded to Elizabethan authors.

This attitude is prevented by two practical considerations. In the first place, it takes so long to set and change a modern scene that a narrative in twenty units would require at least four hours for its presentation, with lapses between the units so protracted that the audience would wander away from the mood of the story; and, in the second place, the expense of twenty modern stage-

sets would ruin the manager of any play. When the development of art is prevented by such practical impediments as these, there is only one thing for the artist to do — he must demand new practical inventions, to remove the obstacles that have been set athwart his path.

Obviously, the two inventions that are needed, in order that the way may be cleared for a new development of extensive drama, are, first, a means of shifting scenery in a few seconds and, second, a means of manufacturing scenery at a very small expense. Until these two inventions are perfected, romance and poetry must continue to endure a fruitless exile from the modern stage.

But, although most of our American managers seem as yet unaware of the revolutions that have silently been taking place in Europe, both of these inventions have been already made and are being rapidly perfected in the futuristic theatres of the world.

The first problem has been solved in Germany by the simple and practical invention of the revolving stage. By this invention, a revolving circle is inscribed within the square platform that is disclosed by the proscenium. This circle will accommodate three settings at the same time. After the first set has been used, the stage may be revolved in a few seconds, to disclose the second set; and while this is being employed by the actors, a

new scene may be erected in place of the one that has been discarded.

This invention has supplanted the earlier type of movable stage which is still in use at the Hofburgtheater in Vienna. The method of this mechanism was to build the stage in a series of platforms, which could be raised or lowered on elevators. A stage of this type was erected many years ago in the old Madison Square Theatre in New York; but it is an evidence of the backwardness of the theatre in America to-day that only two stages of the new revolving type have been installed as yet in the theatres of this country, and that both of these (namely, the stage of the Century Theatre and that of the Little Theatre) have been erected by a single forward-looking manager, Mr. Winthrop Ames. But in time this new invention is sure to be adopted in our other theatres; and, thereafter, it will be possible for us to change the scene of any play without even lowering the curtain. After a few seconds of darkness, the lights may be turned up, to disclose a new vista of the panoramic world.

The second problem — the problem of expense — has also been successfully attacked by such inventors as Mr. Gordon Craig and Professor Max Reinhardt. It is necessary to build solid and expensive scenery for the exhibition of realistic and intensive plays; but this neces-

sity need no longer be imposed upon the authors of extensive and poetic dramas. For the purpose of impressionistic art, impressionistic scenery is adequate. If the scene be imagined in some forest of Arden, an artistic hanging of green curtains will mean more to the imagination than any rotund and heavy forestry of canvas trees; and a subtler atmosphere may be suggested by the deft manipulation of electric lights than by the definite delineation of a myriad details. In Moscow, Mr. Craig has recently produced *Hamlet* with a series of simple screens which are differently lighted to suggest the changing moods of its variable drift of narrative; and, in his decorative pantomime of *Sumurun*, Professor Reinhardt has shown us how simply it is possible to spare expense, in setting forth a story in a dozen scenes, by the employment of flat backgrounds washed in with primary colors and the abolition of the superfluous element of linear perspective.

IV

In view of such inventions as these, the critic cannot be accused of a lack of scientific basis in asking for a new type of play to relieve the monotony of the contemporary theatre. It is no longer unpractical to plead with our poetic and romantic authors to construct their narratives in

twenty scenes, instead of two or three, in the endeavor to recapture "the busy hum of Shakespeare's universal workshop." Our public has been trained so long to look at life only through the small end of its opera glasses that it has grown to neglect the interest that is derivable from looking through the other and the larger end. In thirty years, the new intensive artistry has been developed to such perfection in the theatre that the public has almost forgotten the foregone delights of the extensive drama. But a younger and a freer generation is now knocking at the door. The intensive drama has already done its best, and the time has come for a return to the methods of extensive art.

The drama of the present is so excellent, according to its method, that the drama of the future must be different. The new type of play for which the critic is pleading in the present paper will be not analytic but synthetic. It will not narrow the field of vision to set life apparently under the nose, but will remove life to an enchantment of remoteness in order to enlarge the field of vision. It will not content itself with the analysis of character within constricted bounds of time and place, but will attempt to represent the logical development of character in many places and through many times. It will not be realistic but impressionistic, not prosaic but poetic. It will

exhibit more the martial march of Marlowe than the minute and mincing gait of Stanley Houghton.

This new type of play will assuredly be written by the poets of the rising generation. How long — one wonders — will the public have to wait until it achieves a conquest of the theatre?

VII

THE PERIOD OF PRAGMATISM

THERE have been many periods in the history of the drama — the periods, for instance, of Sophocles, Calderon, Shakespeare, Molière, Racine, and Sheridan — during which every tragedy or comedy of any excellence has been constructed in accordance with a single formula, a formula in each case invented by a group of minor artists and developed to its fullest fruition by the dominant dramatic genius of the age. In these periods there has been no appreciable disagreement among playwrights as to how to build a play. The question of form has been regarded, for the time, as settled, and the scope for individual innovation has been restricted to the content of the drama. One dramatist might differ from another in the mood and message of his plays, but both authors would employ the same methods of technical attack.

In dealing with such periods as these, it has always been comparatively easy for dramatic critics to determine certain fixed standards by which to measure the technical merit of any play

of the period. All that Aristotle had to do was to explain inductively the structural principles which had been employed by Sophocles, and his treatise became at once a text-book for all subsequent authors of Greek tragedy. When Regnard determined to write comedies, he never thought of asking questions as to how to build a play. There was but one way, to his mind — the way, of course, of Molière; and Regnard made his comedies according to the methods of his master.

But these conditions of creation and of criticism do not obtain in the present period of the drama. We are, as Tennyson remarked, “the heirs of all the ages”; and we have taught ourselves, by study of the past and experiment in the present, a myriad different ways of making plays. *Ghosts* is a great drama, and so is *The Blue Bird*; *Strife* is a good play, and so is *Sumurun*; but how is the critic to determine inductively, from the study of such dissimilar instances as these, any fixed and serviceable standard by which to measure the technical merit of any other drama of the present period? He might, indeed, determine after a thorough study of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* that Pinero’s method is the best for making modern plays; but in that case what could he allow himself to say concerning *Cyrano de Bergerac* or *The Playboy of the Western World*?

It was chiefly with this modern age in his mind

that Mr. William Archer began his manual of craftsmanship entitled *Play-Making* with the sagacious statement that "there are no rules for writing plays." He might have added as a corollary that there can be, in consequence, no rules for judging them. In this eclectic age of composition the critic must fall back upon that attitude of mind known to philosophers as "pragmatism." The pragmatists, despairing of the discovery of any absolute, unalterable Truth — and being tempted even, at times, to doubt of its existence — rely, for the immediate purposes of thinking, upon any theory that seems for the moment to fit the facts, and, whenever this theory is controverted by a more catholic experience, relinquish it cheerfully in favor of some other hypothesis which is adequate to serve its turn. They do not ask for the utter truth, they ask only for a theory that shall seem to serve; and by this modesty they insure their philosophy against any disaster from disproof.

Pragmatism can exist only in an age that is able, without discomfort, to disbelieve in dogma. We live in such a period of the dramatic art. Our contemporary playwrights imagine no necessity to agree upon a creed of making plays. Any method will serve — provided only that it shall prove itself of service. This is the spirit of the present age, an age adventurous and youthful, a

period, as the phrase is, "alive and kicking," and therefore one indisputably great. And since criticism must ever follow, and not lead, creation, since the critic must always report the artist like a Boswell instead of teaching him like a Mentor, it follows that the critic of the contemporary drama must maintain an open mind toward any sort of effort and must judge it not in reference to any predetermined rule, but solely in reference to the particular intention of the author. The critic of the current drama must enjoy *The Thunderbolt* and must also appreciate *The Yellow Jacket*, though the peculiar merits of either composition would have been transmuted to defects if they had been incorporated in the other. There is no one way of making plays at present; and the duty of the critic is not to argue in favor of any method against any other, but merely to explain in any given case the particular formula that the playwright has chosen to employ.

The one thing that makes the function of the open-minded commentator unfalteringly pleasurable at the present time is that, every year or so, he is required by some new playwright to alter his entire definition of the drama. He may have decided, after long study, that something must always happen in a play; and then suddenly he will be swept from his anchorage by the London performance of Elizabeth Baker's *Chains*, of which

the whole point is that nothing, by any possibility, can happen to the characters. He may have stated, time and time again, that the method of our modern drama is more visual than auditory, that at present the scenario is more important than the dialogue and that (as Mr. Augustus Thomas has put it) every good contemporary play must employ as its basis an interesting pantomime; and suddenly, without forewarning, he will find himself applauding such a piece as *Hindle Wakes*, which reverses all these propositions and builds its merits on their opposites. Any drama that can do this to the critic is undeniably alive; and unless the critic can respond with equal avidity to these incongruous impressions, he is unsuited to this present age of pragmatism.

But even the pragmatists must yearn occasionally for some vision, however fleeting, of that absolute, unalterable Truth, of which they question the existence; and even the most open-minded dramatic critic must sometimes desire to establish some certain standard of judgment by which he may measure the merit of plays so utterly different in intention and in method as *Hedda Gabler* and *Peter Pan*. This desire is akin to that which, in all ages, has moved the high and immemorial dreamers of our human lineage to seek some single God to supplant, in the imagination of mankind,

the more convenient and pragmatic gods that were assumed by our forefathers as the rulers of the world. The human mind seeks always for some supreme and single thought, and abhors plurality and heterogeneity as nature abhors a vacuum. Therefore — if we may descend suddenly from the general to the particular — the critic of any art desires always some single and indisputable standard by which to estimate the most divergent and incongruous examples of that art. He feels the necessity of some axiom sufficiently catholic to cover and to justify his instinctive homage to two statues so divergent, for example, as the *Venus of Melos* and the *Thinker* of Auguste Rodin. In intention and in method these works are obviously different; but what is the essence of that mystery that tells us intuitively that both of them are great?

This question is not difficult to answer. Any work of art is good if it forces the spectator to imagine and to realize some truth of life; and any effort of art is bad if it fails of this endeavor. Here is the final test of efficiency, and it should be noted that in this test there is no question of technique. Any play, regardless of the method of the author, is a good play if it awakens the audience to a realization of some aspect of the infinitely various assertions of the human will. It must impose upon the spectator the educative

illusion of reality; it must, by this means, increase vicariously his experience of life; and, by adding to his understanding of mankind, it must broaden his potential range of sympathy with human beings both similar and dissimilar to himself. It must exhibit some picture of the particular, so tactfully selected and displayed that it shall suggest a momentary vision of the absolute. It must lead the public out of living into life.

By a standard so essential and so catholic as this, the critic may equitably estimate the merit of innumerable plays, of any period, however divergent they may be in method. It does not ultimately matter whether a play is realistic or romantic, visual or auditory, tightly or loosely constructed, whether it casts its emphasis on character or incident, on scenario or dialogue — it is required only that it command the spectator to pause for a moment in his drift of living and to envisage that reality of life which is perennial and absolute. This is a requirement that is fulfilled by plays so different in technical details as *Tanqueray* and *Cyrano*, *Ghosts* and *Sumurûn*. To accomplish this effect, any method will serve, so long as it shall prove itself of service.

The first thing to be considered in estimating the merit of a new play is, therefore, the sincerity of the author's purpose. Has he honestly and earnestly endeavored to say something that is new

and true, or has he merely effected a new combination of old theatrical materials with the expectation of producing a series of transitory thrills? In the latter case, although his play may run a year, it cannot be considered an addition to dramatic literature; but in the former case, although the piece may fail, the critic must proclaim it worthy. For, as Stevenson has said, "A spirit goes out of the man who means execution. . . . All who have meant good work with their whole hearts, have done good work. . . . Every heart that has beat strong and cheerfully has left a hopeful impulse behind it in the world, and bettered the tradition of mankind."

But a determination to tell the truth — though it is, indeed, the most important item — is not the only asset of excellence in the drama. Art would be a very simple exercise if telling the truth were, in Hamlet's phrase, "as easy as lying"; but it is often very hard to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Any telling of the truth implies the collaboration of two parties — the party of the first part, who does the speaking, and the party of the second part, who does the listening. A dramatist must not only represent his truth in a manner that is satisfying to his own mind, but must also express it in a manner that shall be convincing to his audience. To achieve this delicate endeavor, a high degree of technical accomplish-

ment is necessary, in terms of the particular method that the dramatist has chosen.

In the drama, as in every other art, technique is not an end in itself, but only a means to the great end of telling the truth. In the estimation of the critic, technical dexterity should be considered always a secondary, not a primary, concern. Any method must be adjudged a good method unless it betrays the playwright into compromise or falsification; but clever workmanship that is exercised in the display of trivial material is not admirable in itself.

It is difficult to estimate the comparative importance of several dramas, each of which, in its own way, unfalteringly tells the truth; but it is easy enough to determine if a play is bad. Either because of technical inefficiency, or because of a conscious and responsible surrender of his own apprehension of the truth, the playwright will report his characters as doing certain things, or saying certain things, which those people, in those situations, could not possibly have said and done; and the critical auditor will revolt from the representation with a subconscious sense that he knows better than to believe the fable that is being set before him.

VIII

THE UNDRAMATIC DRAMA

I

THERE are many indications that the time has come for a revision of those traditional definitions of the drama which we have inherited from a long line of critics stretching all the way from Aristotle down to Brunetière. A critical formula can never be fixed and final like a proposition in geometry. The critic derives a principle inductively, from the analysis of many works of art which exhibit a family relation to one another. This principle may subsequently be applied, in a logical process of deduction, to the measurement of other works of art created in imitation, or in emulation, of those from which the formula was originally inferred. But any attempt to impose this principle upon another group of works of art, created in expression of a totally different impulse, would be illogical and, as a consequence, uncritical. Thus, a critic of the tragedies of Shakespeare would properly infer the principle that the chief incidents in a tragic story should be acted on the stage; but a critic of the tragedies of Racine

would be required to infer the contrary principle that the chief incidents in a tragic story should be imagined off the stage.

Such fluctuating principles as these have been altered, easily and unreluctantly, from age to age; but there are a few formulas which have been repeated, with apparent soundness, for so many centuries that they appear as obstacles in the path of critics with whom pragmatism is not a native and instinctive mood of mind. One of these is Aristotle's dictum that action is the prime essential of a play. This ancient critic stated that the method of the drama is to exhibit character in action. So far as I recall, no subsequent critic has ever ventured to argue against this assertion; and yet, if we accept it as a dogma, what are we to do with such a play as Mr. Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes*? This work is undeniably a masterpiece according to its kind, because it reminds us vividly of life and tells us something that is new and true; yet it is almost utterly devoid of action. Its method is not to exhibit character in action but to reveal character through dialogue. What — to repeat — shall be done with such a play? It would surely be a cowardly recourse to beg this question by labeling this interesting and admirable work with such an adjective as "undramatic."

Another statement of Aristotle's that has al-

ways been accepted without argument is that the plot of a play should exhibit a beginning, a middle, and an end. Yet, if we regard this statement as a dogma, what are we to do with such a play as Mr. Granville Barker's *The Madras House*? This piece reveals no definite beginning; and the author has deliberately planned it in such a way that it shall show no end. Structurally, this work is, so to speak, a succession of four middles. The final stage-direction reads, "She doesn't finish, for really there is no end to the subject"; and then the curtain falls, to cut us off from our momentary participation in a dozen lives which are considered as continuous and as undetermined as our own. Shall we dare to dismiss such a fabric as "unstructural," after it has entertained us for two hours with the activity of one of the keenest intellects at present working for the English theatre?

Less than a hundred years ago, the successful German playwright Gustav Freytag wrote a book on *The Technique of the Drama*, in which he asserted that a dramatic plot may be divided into five successive sections, — namely, the Exposition, the Rise, the Climax, the Fall, and the Catastrophe. He induced this principle mainly from a study of the plays of Shakespeare, — a study in which he was hampered by the assumption, which has subsequently been disproved, that Shakespeare

planned his plays in five acts instead of in an uncounted series of scenes. This formula of Freytag's has attained a popular currency that is astonishingly wide; and yet, if we should attempt to support it as a dogma, what could we do with such a play as Mr. Galsworthy's *The Pigeon*? This piece, from the outset to the end, is merely an Exposition of a problem of society: it reveals no Rise, no Climax, no Fall, and no Catastrophe: yet it is a very interesting play and has been accepted by the most intelligent citizens of London and New York as one of the most moving dramas of recent years.

It was only twenty years ago that the late Ferdinand Brunetière announced his famous principle that the essential element of drama is a struggle between human wills. This statement was at once accepted as an axiom. It has been repeated from mouth to mouth so many thousand times, especially in such popular phrases as "dramatic conflict," that very few people realize at present that this formula is not at least as old as Aristotle. Until very recently there have been none so bold to do this principle irreverence, and the formula, "no struggle, no drama," has been accepted as a commonplace of dramatic criticism. Yet, if we receive this statement as a dogma, what are we to do with such a play as *Chains*, by Miss Elizabeth Baker? This piece exhibits not an assertion, but

a negation, of human wills. It presents, at most, a struggle of wills with a minus sign in front of them. The entire point of the play is that nothing can happen to the characters. Their wills are paralyzed by an environment which renders them incapable of self-assertion. Yet few plays of recent years have stirred an audience so deeply to a realization of life.

In his manual of craftsmanship entitled *Play-Making*, that bold and pioneering critic, Mr. William Archer, has devoted a very interesting chapter to a discussion of the intrinsic meaning of the terms "Dramatic and Undramatic." He has bravely rejected the formula of Brunetière as inapplicable to many famous instances. Discarding "conflict" as essential to the drama, Mr. Archer has suggested, in its stead, the element of "crisis." In this point, he seems to follow Robert Louis Stevenson, who referred to the drama as dealing with "those great, passionate crises of existence where duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple." Yet I do not think it would be difficult to convince so open-minded a critic as Mr. Archer that the element of "crisis" is no more indispensable to a genuinely interesting drama than the element of "conflict." Where, for instance, is there any crisis in *The Madras House*, which — if I remember rightly — Mr. Archer much admired? Where is the element of

crisis in *The Pigeon*? And where, after the very first minute of the action, is there any crisis in *The Great Adventure*?

In the face of these negations of even the most modest effort to advance a dogma, it would seem that the only course for the critic is to retreat to the position thus admirably put by Mr. Archer, — “The only really valid definition of the dramatic is: Any representation of imaginary personages which is capable of interesting an average audience assembled in a theatre. . . . Any further attempt to limit the content of the term ‘dramatic’ is simply the expression of an opinion that such-and-such forms of representation will not be found to interest an audience; and this opinion may always be rebutted by experiment.”

The fact that, in recent years, every attempt to limit the content of the term “dramatic” has been rebutted by experiment must be accepted as an evidence that we are living in a very vigorous period of dramatic art. No playwright is so indisputably a creative artist as one who can send the critics back to their studies to revise their definitions of the drama. The attitude of such an artist may be phrased familiarly as follows: “You tell me that such-and-such a process has never yet been followed in the drama: very well, — I will show you that it can be followed, with both artistic and popular success.” If, after this assumed

assertion, the creative artist fails in his endeavor, his failure may be taken as an evidence of the inviolability of the principle he has assaulted; but, if he succeeds, there can be no other recourse for the critic than to discard the ancient formula and to induce a new one.

But this necessity is repugnant to the type of critic who hates to change his mind. In the epilogue to *Fanny's First Play*, Mr. Bernard Shaw has introduced a critic of this type, in the figure of the ultra-Aristotelian Mr. Trotter. Of the later works of Mr. Shaw and many of his emulators, Mr. Trotter simply and definitely says: "They are not plays." He is willing to consider them as essays, as discussions, or as conversations; but he will not consider them as plays, since Aristotle never saw the like of them. But this view of Mr. Trotter's seems unnecessarily narrow. Surely — as Mr. Archer has stated — any story presented by actors on a stage, which interests an audience, cannot be denied the name of drama: one might as logically look a lion in the eyes and tell him he was not a lion. And if only an action that is motivated by a struggle of the wills can be labeled with the adjective "dramatic," let us, by all means, hasten to admit that there is such a thing as "undramatic drama."

This playful contradiction in terms affords the critic a convenient label to apply to many modern

works which, while violating at several points the traditional canons of dramatic criticism, have evoked an enthusiastic response from audiences of more than usual intelligence. If we smilingly apply to these works the paradoxical adjective "undramatic," this pleasant exercise of whimsicality should be taken as a tribute to the authors' skill in stretching the traditional limitations of the drama to force them to encompass something strange and new.

II

An effort to achieve a new type of "undramatic drama" has made itself apparent very recently in the works of several of the younger realistic writers of Great Britain; and this effort has already assumed such important proportions that it constitutes one of the most interesting movements in the contemporary theatre. Among the writers who have contributed to this new movement are Granville Barker, John Galsworthy, John Masefield, Elizabeth Baker, Macdonald Hastings, Stanley Houghton, Githa Sowerby, and Arnold Bennett. These authors differ markedly from one another in the mood and message of their plays, but they exhibit a surprising agreement in their revolutionary manner of attacking the technical traditions of the stage.

It is apparently their purpose to carry the

drama more nearly into accord with actuality than it has ever been before, by the expedient of ignoring the tradition of the well-made play. Instead of attempting further to perfect the pattern of play-making which has been handed down from Scribe, through Dumas *filis* and Ibsen, to Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, they have chosen to discard the pattern and to adopt a method of construction more closely in accordance with the modesty of nature. They do not build their stories to a climax at the close of the penultimate act; for they disdain the easy emphasis of curtain-falls and desire to avoid any artificial heightening of a single favored incident. They seem to disagree with the immemorial axiom of Aristotle that a play should have a beginning, a middle, and an end; for they admit only that the drama must exhibit the middle of an action. Their plays begin almost anywhere, and often do not end at all. We feel — and the authors desire us to feel — that they might have stopped an act sooner or written ten acts more. By deliberately avoiding a conclusion, and by starting the story at a point which presupposes innumerable antecedent causes, these authors seek to imitate the drift of life itself, — which exhibits no beginnings and no endings, but only an appalling continuity.

Nature is neither selective of events nor logical in the arrangement of them; but without selection

and arrangement it is impossible to make a plot. In this dilemma, the apostles of the "undramatic drama" prefer to side with nature, and are willing, whenever necessary, to get along without a plot. In order to remove attention from the element of plot, they cast entire emphasis upon the element of character. Character is all they care about; and provided that their imaginary people are representative and real, they do not deem it indispensable that they shall reveal themselves in terms of action. They even undertake to extend the province of the drama by including in their plays such unassertive characters as have always been regarded hitherto as undramatic. They refuse to restrict the drama to an exhibition of a struggle between human wills resulting necessarily in action, and often choose instead to exhibit a deadlock between human wills that results in the negation of action.

Such characters as these, when exhibited upon the stage, must reveal themselves mainly through the medium of dialogue. What they think and what they feel must express itself more through what they are heard to say than through what they are seen to do. The plays of the new realists are therefore less visual, and more auditory, in their appeal than the majority of our contemporary dramas. It appears that these young authors might have taken for their motto that

striking phrase of Stevenson's, in a letter to Mr. Henry James — "Death to the optic nerve." By their reliance upon dialogue as the essential factor of their plays, they seem to be seeking what may be called a return to literature. Their dialogue is masterly: it has to be; for their plays appeal so little to the eye that the audience is required to listen closely to the spoken words.

What, now, shall be said concerning these departures from the practice of the greatest playwrights of the elder generation? Much, upon the one hand, may be said against them. The endeavor of the new realists is based upon the assumption that life itself is more dramatic than any theatrical selection and arrangement of events. They therefore exercise their artistry in an effort to conceal the fact that the drama is different from nature. But if this effort were ever perfectly successful, the drama would cease to have a reason for existence, and the only logical consequence would be an abolition of the theatre. It would seem, as a matter of principle, that there can scarcely be a fruitful future for a movement which, if extended to the utmost, would result in a *reductio ad absurdum*.

But, on the other hand, if we judge the apostles of the new realism less by their ultimate aims than by their present achievements, we must admit that they are rendering a very useful service by hold-

ing the mirror up to many interesting contrasts between human characters which have hitherto been ignored in the theatre merely because they would not fit neatly into the pattern of the well-made play. And in presenting their unconventional material, these young authors have succeeded in producing an astonishing impression of reality. By suggesting the potential intensity of a static situation, they often achieve an effect that is more profoundly moving than if they had made the stage noisy with alarums and excursions. Even a critic who might disagree with their theories could not fail to recognize and to admire the extraordinary talents of these authors. Because of the sincerity of their respect for life and the seriousness of their endeavor to represent it faithfully, they have already earned a high rank upon the roster of contemporary dramatists.

IX

THE VALUE OF STAGE CONVENTIONS

IN his *Carol of Occupations* Walt Whitman said, "All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it; . . . all music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments." It is particularly true of the drama that the only finally effective scenes are those that happen not so much upon the stage as in the mind of the spectator. The purpose of a play is not to reproduce the actual but to suggest the real, and this suggestion must be made through the medium of many theatrical conventions which, though in themselves unnatural, are competent to stimulate the audience to the imagining of nature.

The conventions of the theatre have differed widely in different times and lands, and the acceptance of any particular set of conventions is merely a matter of public custom. To the theatre-going public of any period the conventions of their own stage always seem simple and natural because they are accustomed to them, whereas the conventions of any other period appear unnatural and forced. To our public at the present time

it would seem funny if the actors in a tragedy should wear cardboard masks and walk on stilted boots, yet this convention seemed simple and natural to the Athenians who listened to the tragedies of Sophocles. It would seem unnatural to-day if an ancient Roman emperor should appear upon the stage in the costume of Louis XIV of France, yet this convention was employed without disadvantage in the tragedies of Racine. We should think it odd if an orator on a bare platform out of doors, with the afternoon sun striking full upon his face, should suddenly remark, " 'Tis now the very witching time of night," but Shakespeare's audience in 1602 never thought of laughing when Burbage read this line in *Hamlet*. We should regard it as unusual if an actor should enter a room by walking through the walls, but this convention never bothered the original spectators of *The School for Scandal*. By such expedients as these, Sophocles and Shakespeare and Racine and Sheridan stimulated in their audiences a keener sense of truth than is ever suggested by our own minute and timorous imitation of the actual.

Because of the influence of custom, the public of to-day pays no attention to many artifices of our own theatre which are fully as unnatural as the conventions that have just been noticed. It is not natural, for instance, that a room should

have three walls instead of four, and that nearly all the furniture should be turned to face the invisible fourth wall. In actual life people talk for two hours without moving from a chair; but on our stage they get up at the end of every two or three minutes and cross over to another chair on the opposite side of the room. Furthermore, our actors keep their faces turned nine-tenths of the time in a single, certain direction, and whisper their most intimate concerns in a voice that is easily audible to a thousand people. In our modern theatre people eat an elaborate dinner of a dozen courses in ten minutes or less; they rarely write a letter without reading it aloud as they compose it; and if they light a single lamp, they increase by several hundred candle-power the illumination of the room. An actor who has just dropped dead upon the stage gets up a moment afterwards to smile and make a speech. Two hours elapse in ten minutes, and when an actor fingers a piano the music comes from off the stage. These conventions, viewed from an external and unsympathetic point of view, are just as ridiculous as those which were employed by Sophocles and Shakespeare; and the only reason why we do not laugh at them to-day is that we are accustomed to accept them.

The drama can never be natural, for the ultimate and lofty reason that if ever it should suc-

ceed in this endeavor it would annihilate its own excuse for being. Art would be unnecessary unless it were different from nature. In the light of this truth, the present prevailing endeavor of our stage to hold, in a precise and literal sense, the mirror up to nature must be regarded as a waste of energy. Often in our modern theatre we prevent the audience from imagining the real by setting before it too literal an imitation of the actual. It is therefore desirable, for the esthetic education of our contemporary theatre-goers, that they should be reminded now and then of the freer and less literal conventions that have been easily accepted in the drama of other times and lands. From the cultural and critical standpoint this is the main advantage of such exhibitions of the stage conventions of other periods as were offered in that memorable series of historical matinées that marked the closing weeks of the New Theatre. It is good for us to be reminded now and then that the dramatic method of Shakespeare was, with all its crudities, more stimulating to the imagination than is the dramatic method of Mr. Belasco; but to accomplish this, it is necessary to produce Shakespeare in the Elizabethan manner instead of in the manner of to-day.

Looked upon in the light of such considerations as these, the recent production of *The Yellow Jacket* must be regarded as the most educative of-

fering which has been presented in New York for several seasons. No interested student of the stage can afford to ignore it. But the merits of this remarkable play are not merely educational; for, apart from its historical significance, it is an esthetic composition of rare and subtle beauty.

The Yellow Jacket is an imaginary Chinese play, presented in accordance with the conventions of the Chinese theatre. It was devised and written by Mr. J. Harry Benrimo and Mr. George C. Hazleton, Jr. The scene represents the stage of the old Jackson Street Theatre in San Francisco, and upon this stage a typical Chinese story is enacted in the Chinese manner.

The conventions of the Chinese stage are curiously similar to those of the Elizabethan theatre, and the story of *The Yellow Jacket* is therefore unfolded in accordance with a narrative method that is almost identical with Shakespeare's. As in the Globe Theatre on the Bankside, the stage is a platform devoid of scenery, but decorated by furniture and properties that are shifted, from dialogue to dialogue, to accommodate the exigencies of the action. Again, as at the Globe, there is a door at either side of the rear of the stage — one for entrances and one for exits. Between these two doors there is an alcove, or recess, which was used by Shakespeare as part of the imagined scene, but is employed in the Chinese theatre to house

the orchestra that accompanies the dialogue with incidental music. Over this alcove there is, in both theatres, a balcony, or upper stage, which may be used at any moment in the presentation of the story. The scene is imagined to be wherever the actors say that it is, and the place of the action may be shifted by the simple expedient of emptying the stage through the exit door and bringing on new actors through the entrance door. There is a chorus, as in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, to ask the audience to imagine the locality of the scene about to be presented; and, from dialogue to dialogue, the furniture is shifted by a property-man, who is dressed in black and is supposed to be invisible.

These Chinese conventions, which are identical at nearly every point with those of Shakespeare, are only in a small degree less natural than those of our American stage to-day; but because our public is not used to them, they seem to us ridiculous. Of this necessary reaction of the occidental audience the authors of *The Yellow Jacket* have carefully made capital. They have invited the American public to laugh at the conventions of the Chinese theatre and have thereby enriched their play with comedy. But, by doing this, they have also accomplished a more difficult achievement. They seem to have reasoned that their auditors, by the mere exercise of laughing their

fill at these outlandish artifices, would become so accustomed to them that in time these very conventions would cease to seem ridiculous and might securely be employed for the suggestion of lofty poetry and poignant pathos. This subtle triumph has been successfully achieved.

It would be superfluous to summarize the story of this play, since no enumeration of its ever-fluctuating flow of incidents could suggest the whimsical and subtle art with which the story is unfolded. The black-robed property-man (who is supposed to be invisible) piles a few chairs together in the middle of the stage, smoking all the while a careless cigarette and looking ludicrously bored at the performance. A young man and a young woman climb upon the chairs, and tell you that they are reclining in a flower-boat that is drifting slowly down a river. Two attendants (imagined to be boatmen) stand behind the chairs and pole rhythmically at the unresisting air with slender bamboo-rods (imagined to be oars), while a musician (in full view of the audience) scrapes two pieces of sand-paper together to imitate the swish of water along the bilge of a boat; and lo!, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the crudity of these conventions, the auditor finds himself really and truly (because imaginatively) drifting in a boat, banked with flowers and lyrical with song and redolent of youth and love. To achieve such

an eloquent effect as this by means so primitive and childish is a scarcely preceded triumph of theatric art.

The story drifts through many different moods, satiric, tragic, lyric, pathetic; and all these moods are rendered easily through media of utterance at which the audience has laughed heartily only a moment before. The lines are beautifully written, and the action appeals so poignantly to the imagination that we realize a life-revealing vision, of which no literal transcription is presented on the stage.

X

THE SUPERNATURAL DRAMA

THERE is a predisposition on the part of the populace (and also of most of the reviewers) to regard any play which employs the supernatural as especially imaginative. Such a work is considered particularly difficult to accomplish; and the result is commonly labeled "literary," in the laudatory connotation of the term. It is considered difficult to invent a devil with horns and a tail, and comparatively easy to create an Iago devoid of those unusual appendages. It is considered especially "literary" to set forth a five o'clock tea given by a guinea-hen, whereas (presumably) it would not be "literary" to exhibit an afternoon tea given by a society woman. To the popular mind, it seems highly imaginative to invent a faun through whose body you may shoot a bullet without hurting him; but it would not (apparently) be imaginative to create a man whose viscera would be disturbed by such a transit. It is considered poetic to invent a piper whom children follow because of some magic in his music; presumably it would not be poetic to create a man

whom children would follow because they liked to play with him.

Any *a priori* judgment is uncritical, because it denies the possibility that a new work may prove an exception to the rule on which the judgment has been based. But if the popular mind *must* presume an *a priori* judgment of these exhibitions of the supernatural, it might more safely presume them to be less difficult, less imaginative, less (in the real sense) literary, than plays which reproduce the natural. In the infancy of the human race, as in the infancy of every individual (for the mental history of each of us repeats the mental history of mankind), all stories were supernatural — the reason being that the supernatural is immeasurably easier, both to fabricate and to appreciate, than is the natural. And the supernatural is easier to invent and to understand because it requires less maturity of imagination. Imagination is the faculty for realization. Contrary to the common belief, children are, as a rule, incapable of imagination. They tell themselves stories of ghosts and goblins and fairies because they are unable to realize men and women and children; they invent exceptions to the laws of life because they cannot understand the laws; they wonder at a dog that talks because they have not learned to wonder at a dog that merely barks. So, in its infancy, the human race told itself stories

of miracles and considered the exceptional divine; it has required a more matured imagination to perceive that divinity is evidenced not in "some scission in the continuity of man's experience, some wilful illegality of nature," but in law itself, majestic and immutable. The function of imagination is to discover truth; the function of art is to tell it. Myths and fables are of service only as an easy and a shorthand means of indicating simple truths. The unusual is of value in art only in so far as it calls attention to the usual in life; exceptions are important only as they indicate the rule. To prefer miracles to laws, to dally with the exception rather than to delve for the rule, is to exercise not the imagination but the fancy. As the wisest of American critics, Mr. W. C. Brownell, has remarked, "Imagination and fancy differ in that, both transcending experience, one observes and the other transgresses law." Now, of course, a supernatural fable may be faithful to the laws of life, may (in other words) embody an imaginative vision; but in practice, in this present age of ours, a reversion to the infancy of art more often indicates an irresponsibility of fancy, an unwillingness on the part of the artist to undertake and carry through the lofty task of transmuting the actual to the real. The fancy is a dangerous faculty, because its exercise is easy and is invariably attended by great

good fun, whereas to exercise imagination is laborious and cannot be accomplished (to speak figuratively) without fasting and prayer. All that M. Rostand had to say in *Chantecler* might have been said more profoundly if he had realized his characters as men and women. The piece becomes imaginative only in those passages in which it becomes human; at all other moments it is merely fanciful — the *jeu d'esprit* of a mind that dallies instead of the great task of a mind that toils. Since beauty is synonymous with truth, as Keats has taught us, it is only by imagination that beauty can be created; all that fancy can contrive is prettiness. It is usually an artist with a dainty fancy who chooses to tell us tales of skipping fauns and magic pipes; but it requires an august imagination to reveal to us the beauty inherent in the common life of every day. Sir James Barrie displayed a pretty fancy in *Peter Pan*; but in *What Every Woman Knows* he revealed a beautiful imagination. Of these two plays by the same author, the natural is immeasurably more imaginative than the supernatural.

But if it is a fallacy to prejudge that a supernatural play must be more imaginative, it is no less a fallacy to accord it *a priori* a higher literary rank, than a play of ordinary life. A play deserves to be lauded as dramatic literature only when it expresses, in terms of the technique of

the theatre of its age, some truth of human life that is important to humanity. Fine writing does not make dramatic literature. Verbal felicity in dialogue is a beauty that is only skin-deep; the real literary value of a play depends upon the symmetry and strength of its skeleton and the vitality of its flesh and blood. *The Thunderbolt* is a greater work of dramatic literature than *Chantecler*, because it is more profoundly and consistently imagined—in other words, more real; yet in *The Thunderbolt* there is not a single line that is quotable for verbal beauty, while in *Chantecler* there are pages and pages that are marvels of the wizardry of words. The best written speech in Mrs. Marks's *The Piper*—the address to the wayside image—is, dramatically, an error; it is written charmingly, but a master of dramatic literature would not have written it at all. Supernatural plays afford their authors opportunities for verbal flights of fancy which are denied to authors who aim to paraphrase the speech of ordinary men and women; but the task of the latter is no less a feat of literary art. A greater literary imagination is displayed in these bare, undecorative lines of the first act of *The Thunderbolt*—“Ah, Heath, the dining room—!” “Yes, Mr. Elkin, that's over, sir”—lines through which, as they come to us in their context, the full pathos of death looks out upon us with dim, un-

weeping eyes, than in such a line as M. Rostand's, "*Que des Coqs rococos pour ce Coq plus cocasse*," of which the only ground is an astounding rebound of sound.

In one particular respect, supernatural material is especially hazardous for the dramatic artist. The corner-stone of the dramatic art is the freedom of the will. No conflict of wills can afford a true dramatic interest unless the wills of the participants are absolutely free. Now, if, in a story, certain characters are endowed with supernatural powers, while the others are not, no truly dramatic conflict can be possible between the one side and the other. We are asked to watch a game in which we know the dice are loaded. In the last act of *The Faun*, by Mr. Edward Knoblauch, the other characters are merely puppets whose wires are pulled by the supernatural hero; and in *The Piper* the people of Hamelin are at all times powerless against the magic of the mountebank. These conceptions abnegate the very possibility of drama. If, then, a playwright is to use the supernatural at all, it is surely wiser for him not to adulterate it with the natural, but to conceive *all* his characters in accordance with a common convention. This is what M. Rostand has done in *Chantecler*. His characters all have a fair chance, because all are equally super-actual. He has displayed consummate tact in entirely excluding hu-

man beings from his story — a tact which expresses itself very cleverly in the concluding line, “*Chut! Baissez le rideau, vite!—Voilà les hommes!*”

It is probable that *Chantecler* would have succeeded in Paris if Coquelin had lived to play it; but it is not surprising that in the hands of M. Lucien Guitry — an admirable actor of modern rôles but not an eloquent elocutionist — it actually failed; for of the six theatric poems of M. Rostand it is assuredly the least dramatic. It is not so much a play as a lyrico-satirical extravaganza. We may best bring ourselves to understand its special quality if we view it as a result of the logical and natural development of those tendencies which M. Rostand exhibited in his earlier works. M. Rostand is the most successful playwright of the present age; but it has been evident from the outset of his career that he is by instinct less a dramatist than a theatricist. He conceives a play not as a serene and orderly development of a single inherent dramatic idea, but as an agglomeration of a myriad of isolate theatrical effects. His eagerness for effective moments — or momentary effects — stamps him of the race and lineage of Victor Hugo; like Hugo, he makes a play by stringing together a multitude of startling theatrical devices. The defect of this method is that, as it is developed, it leads to greater in-

tricacy—whereas the tendency of the highest dramaturgic art is always toward a greater simplicity. The simplest—the most classic—of his works is *La Samaritaine*. Already in *Cyrano* it was evident that he would become progressively more intricate from work to work. *L'Aiglon* indicated still more emphatically his developing avidity for multifarious detail. And now at last in *Chantecler* we can no longer see the forest for the trees—or rather, for the wildwood undergrowth which riots in profuse entanglement. The dramatic theme in *Chantecler* is the tale of the eternal struggle of the artist, possessed with a sense of the sacred necessity of his mission, to adjust himself to a society that fails to understand him and to accept him at his own self-valuation; but this theme is overgrown with a myriad minor satirical intentions—the satire of Boulevard cynicism in the Blackbird, of social pretension in the Guinea-Hen, of academic criticism of poetry in the Chickens, of pedantry in the Woodpecker, of literary criticism of music in the chorus of Toads, of estheticism in the Peacock, of what may be called George-Sand-ism in the Pheasant-Hen, and so on *ad infinitum*. Unless we had clearly understood his progressive trend toward unnecessary intricacy, we might easily have wondered why M. Rostand should have bothered to invent the whole elaborate machinery of his magni-

fied barnyard to serve as a vehicle for satirizing such every-day foibles as all these. Surely it would have been not only simpler but much funnier to exhibit a society woman behaving like a guinea-hen — as Heaven knows how many do! — than to set forth a guinea-hen behaving like a society woman.

The same increasing intricacy that M. Rostand has exhibited as a playwright he has displayed also as a poet. His earliest pieces, like *Les Romanesques*, revealed him as a new Théodore de Banville, a writer of pretty and witty verses, dainty and dallying, delicate and deft. His gifts were those of a minor, rather than a major, poet; and if he has since developed the magnitude of the major poet, he has done so by the unprecedented process of raising his gifts of the minor poet to the *n*th power. He is a big poet only by virtue of being the largest of the little poets of the world. His supreme merit — and his supreme defect — is cleverness. He is hardly an imaginative writer; but he has the most fertile and the most luxuriant fancy apparent in contemporary literature. He has achieved serenity of mood only in *La Samaritaine*, wherein an ecstasy of simplicity was imposed upon him by the sanctity of his material. In his other works he has shown himself always a chaser after butterflies. Even Cyrano, in his love scene, must define a kiss as “a rosy

dot upon the eye of *loving*” — a quip unimaginable if the poet-hero were really and deeply moved. And in the bewildering verbiage of *Chantecler* the extravagance of the poet’s fancy is developed to the uttermost excess. In his earliest works M. Rostand loved to intoxicate himself with words; and the habit of verbal inebriety has grown upon him, until in *Chantecler* nearly every line seems to reel with a bedazzlement of fantasy. Surely this is dangerously near the art that defeats itself by being too artistic.

In the published text of *Chantecler* the stage-direction which describes the scenic setting of each act is written as a sonnet; and this needless audacity of cleverness gives us the clue to M. Rostand’s quality as a poet. These stage-directions are fully as poetic as the text. Consider this concluding tercet of the description of the setting for the second act:

Le ciel est de chez nous. Et lorsque illuminée
Fumera dans un coin quelque humble cheminée,
On croira voir fumer la pipe de Corot.

No other writer could have fancied that “smoking of the pipe of Corot” — and no other poet would have considered it worth while to do so in a stage-direction. M. Rostand’s best effects are purely effects of words. His wit is verbal, his mirth a jugglery of sounds. Even his poetry is

verbal; it is not the image that delights us, but the verse. Hence, as plays, his works demand elocution more than they demand acting; he needed Coquelin to read his lines with that bravura of incomparable voice. He is a consummate writer, surely; but he has the air of a spoiled child sporting in an illimitable play-room where all the toys are words.

XI

THE IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE

I

ART and Nature compete eternally with each other in the great task of making humanity aware of what is true and beautiful and good. They are the two teachers in this school-room of a world to which we are come — we know not whence — as scholars; and we have much to learn from both of them in the little time allotted before school is suddenly let out and we frolic forth — we know not whither. It would be difficult to judge decisively whether Art or Nature is the greater teacher. Nature has more to tell us, but Art is better skilled for utterance. Nature has so much to say that she has no patience for articulation. She thrills us with a vague awareness of multitudinous indecipherable messages; but she speaks to us in whispers and in thunders — elusive, indeterminate, discomfiting. Art, with less to say, has more patience for the formulation of her messages; she speaks to us in a voice that has been deliberately trained, and her utterance is lucid and precise. She does not try, like Nature,

to tell us everything at once. She selects, instead, some single definite and little truth to tell us at a time, and exerts herself to speak it clearly. We can never estimate precisely what it is that we have learned from Nature; but whenever Art has spoken to us, we know exactly what we have been told. Nature stirs and tortures us to a mazy apprehension of illimitables; but Art contents us with careful limitations and calms us with achieved lucidity.

But, in this compensatory universe, every advantage carries with it a concomitant disadvantage. The besetting danger to the usefulness of Art as a teacher of mankind lurks inherent in this very capacity for orderly articulation. Art is only human, after all, and is liable to the human sin of vanity. More and more, as Art advances in efficiency of utterance, she tends to take delight in listening to the sound of her own voice; she tends to value method more dearly than material; she tends to forget that the thing to be said is immeasurably more important than any gracefulness in saying it. Thus artistry, as it advances toward perfection, destroys its purpose and defeats itself.

Whenever artistry becomes too cleverly and nicely organized, whenever Art succumbs to the vanity of self-consciousness, it is necessary that seekers for the truth should forsake Art and re-

turn to Nature. At such a time the really earnest scholar will throw away his books and seek his reading in the running brooks. Humanity advances not along a straight line but along a circulating spiral; it progresses through a series of revolutions and reversions; and the motive of every progressive revolution is the recurrent yearning to return to Nature. "Let us return to Nature! Let us turn backward in order to move forward!" — this has been the watchword of the revolutionists in every age when Art has grown inefficient through efficiency. There is no other way than this to cure the vanity of Art and make her useful once again.

We live at present in an age when the dramatic art has attained a technical efficiency which has never been approached before in the whole history of the theatre. Our best-made plays are better made than those of any other period. Consider for a moment the craftsmanship displayed in such a work as that ultimate monument of intensive artistry, *The Thunderbolt*, of Sir Arthur Pinero. There is no play of Shakespeare's that is so staggeringly admirable in every last and least detail of technical adjustment. When artistry has gone so far as this there is nothing more for it to do. Such accomplishment defeats itself, for it leaves the artist nothing further to accomplish. What is to be done when we are brought to such a

period? . . . There can be but one answer to that question: — Let us return to Nature.

For it is evident that, though Art has taught our present playwrights more than she ever taught their predecessors, Nature has taught them less. Our drama is too technical; our dramatists care more for artistry than they care for life. The highest pleasure that we may derive from the contemporary drama at its best is the critical pleasure of following point by point the unfaltering development of a faultless pattern. But the theatre — as we know from Sophocles and Shakespeare and Molière — is capable of affording a greater pleasure than this, — a pleasure less critical and more creative. Our contemporary plays are masterly in method, but comparatively unimportant in material. It is a sign of their essential insignificance that they tell us truths that are not even beautiful; for it is only when truth has ascended to that level where — as in the vision of Keats — it becomes identical with beauty, that it is, in any real sense, worth the telling. Our drama deals mainly with the artificial emotions of super-civilized aristocrats who dwell in cities: it sets before us a Criticism of Society instead of the Romance of Man.

When we have dwelt for many months in a metropolis, and dressed for dinner every night, and exchanged small talk concerning trivialities,

and grown exceedingly clever and witty and graceful and urbane, there comes a time for us to break away—it is the time when violets are peeping—to far places where people have no manners, where they talk from the heart instead of from the head and where a wide earth is swept with winds all murmurous with whispers from the sea, and at night there is a sky of many stars.—The theatre has its seasons also; and when the drama has grown too clever and urbane, too artistic and too trivial, it is time to break away. For, somewhere, terrific seas are surging on forlorn coasts far away, and simple folk are making music to each other in imaginative speech. Let us then be riders to the sea, and wander till we meet a playboy, talking deep love in the shadow of a glen.

II

These general considerations must be held in mind as we turn our critical attention to the aims and achievements of the Irish National Theatre Society. This society was organized in 1901 by Mr. William Butler Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory. The founders had two purposes in view:—first, to develop a drama that should be distinctly national, so that Ireland might have a voice in the concerted theatre of the world, and second, to reachieve a union between truth and

beauty in the drama by effecting a return to nature, in both material and method. In practice, these two purposes soon proved themselves to be identical; for both the authors and the actors found that the surest method for accomplishing the first was to devote themselves enthusiastically to the second.

These Irish idealists at once rejected from their range of subject-matter all themes suggested by the life of cities and by the manners of what are called the upper classes, — first, because such material was not definitively Irish, and second, because it was not — in any deep sense — human. Facility of intercommunication has made every modern metropolis more cosmopolitan than national; and to seek the heart of any country it is now necessary to delve into aloof and rural districts. Furthermore, our modern civilization — which is largely artificial — has refined the higher classes of society to such a point that they now ignore, or cynically smile upon, those basic, impulsive, and primordial emotions that spring spontaneously from the heart of man.

The Irish authors decided also, from the outset, to revolt against that tyranny of merely technical achievement to which the international contemporary drama is subservient. This is an age of plot and stage-direction, — of emotion evidenced in action, of action elucidated to the eye by every

deliberate aid to visual illusion. The Irish playwrights would have none of this. Not plot, but character, was what they chose to care about, since people are more real than incidents. They renounced the technical empery of plot, and rejected the tradition of the well-made play. If they could reveal character sufficiently in situation, they did not consider it a further duty to set it forth in action. They did not deem it necessary to rely on stage-direction to convince the eye, since they could revert to an earlier stage of the development of the drama and rely on eloquence of writing to convince the ear. They chose to make a drama that is less visual and more auditory than that to which we have become commonly accustomed in the international theatre of to-day. They decided that the surest way to return to nature was to return to literature.

Actuated by these aims, the Irish playwrights found, in the peasant life of Ireland, innumerable subjects made to their hand. That life was at once definitively national and primordially human. By geographical position and by historical isolation, that emerald island floating in the far Atlantic has remained the utter outpost of European civilization. Only the larger cities have been annexed — in any real sense — to the British Empire; only the aristocracy is cosmopolitan. The peasants of the rural counties are not Saxon, but

Celtic in ancestry and temperament; and the life of those aloof and desultory districts is not modern, but early medieval. The far, forgotten islands that are washed by the isolating western sea are populated with a peasantry who have escaped the long and gradual advance of time and who, defended from modernity, still play around the nursery of this grown-up and over-wearied world. Age has not withered them, nor custom staled. They love and hate and worship and blaspheme like little children, gloriously irresponsible to the calming and adult dictates of modern civilization, and panged with the terrible and thrilling growing-pains of the primeval human soul.

And, by a providential accident, these crude, uncultured people speak to each other with an easy eloquence that hovers only a little lower than the speech of angels. They have not yet, as we have, filed and simplified their speech to a workaday and placid prose. Their words have longer memories than ours, and float forth trailing clouds of glory. Their common speaking surges with a tidal chant, like that of the recurrent singing of the sea. When Wordsworth, leading his own lonely and much-ridiculed return to Nature, sought to restrict the utterance of poetry to the daily speech of dalesmen, he lost his aim amid a diction inadequate to the occasion; and, for his greater sonnets, he found himself necessitated to

revert to the language of the mental aristocracy. But the language of Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge is unfalteringly eloquent; and Synge, in his prefaces, and Lady Gregory, in her conversations, have both assured us that they have used no words in their writings that they have not heard falling naturally from the lips of Irish peasants incapable of reading or of signing their own names. Thus, in returning to Nature, they discovered a well-spring ebullient with poetry. Faring forth to seek the true, they found the beautiful.

III

Such being the purposes of the founders of the Irish National Theatre Society, it was evident from the outset that they could not intrust the presentation of their plays to professional London actors trained to other aims. They therefore organized a company of their own, composed of young men and women engaged in various businesses in Dublin, who were eager to devote their leisure hours to the pleasant exercise of acting. This company, in origin, was *amateur*; and it was not till 1904, when it became established permanently at the Abbey Theatre, that it grew to be professional. In spirit, the Abbey Theatre Players are still *amateur*; and this is said, of course, in praise of them. It is evident that they act for the love of acting. It would seem to be

their motto that "no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame, but each for the joy of the working." Fame and money have been added unto them in recent years, for they have captured London and set siege to Boston and Chicago and New York; but it is apparent from their work that they are inspired still, as ever, with the joy of working. And this is the main reason why their artless artistry is charming; for there is nothing more enjoyable than joy.

Their acting is so different from ours, in aim, in spirit, and in method, that there can be no profit in arguing as to whether it is better or whether it is not so good. Their stage-direction is elementary and casual. They are sparing of gesticulation. They care far less than we do about making appealing pictures to the eye; and they care far more than we do about the delicate, alluring art of reading. They never move about the stage unnecessarily, in the fancied interest of visual variety; often, for long passages, they merely sit still, or stand about, and talk. But, with them the lines are all-important. Their plays are written eloquently; and they repeat this written eloquence with an affectionate regard for rhythm and the harmony of words.

Character, not action, is the dominant element in the Irish plays; and it is therefore not surprising that the Irish Players are inferior to our own

in representing rapid and emphatic action, and superior in the deliberate and gradual portraiture of personality. All the Irish Players are what are called, in the slang of the theatre, character actors. But they draw their portraits mainly by the means of speech, and rely far less than we do on make-up and facial expression. With them, as with their authors, the drama has returned to literature.

IV

We may now examine several of the most characteristic pieces in the repertory which the Abbey Theatre Players have presented, in recent seasons, in America; and, first of all, it will be pleasant to turn our attention to the one-act plays of Lady Gregory. In the sense of the word to which we have grown accustomed in the conventional theatre, these delightful little sketches are scarcely plays at all. It would be more precise to speak of them as anecdotes. The author sets forth two or three characters in a single situation, and draws them thoroughly in dialogue; she does not seem to care especially whether the incident which reveals the characters is active or passive; she does not work the situation up to any emphatic climax; but having opened a momentary little vista upon life, she smilingly remarks "That's all" and rings the curtain down. Her vision is both poetical and humorous; she enjoys the rare

endowment of sagacity; and she writes with eloquence and ease.

Spreading the News is a good-natured satire of the extravagant growth of gossip among people whose imagination is stronger than their common sense. A farmer forgets his pitch-fork, on the outskirts of a fair; and a second farmer, finding it, hurries after to return it to him. A bystander remarks casually to a deaf old apple-woman that Bartley Fallon is running after Jack Smith with a pitch-fork. The apple-woman tells some one else that Fallon has attacked Smith with murderous intent. The story grows and grows as it passes from mouth to mouth, until an assembled crowd believe that Smith is slain and invent a number of plausible motives for the murder. The rumor reaches the ears of the police; and Fallon is arrested, protesting vainly against the embattled certainty of the accusing public. Then Smith strolls back, safe and sound, and finds it difficult to convince the crowd that he is not a ghost.

The Workhouse Ward is a deliciously sagacious bit of humorous characterization. Two old paupers are discovered lying in adjacent beds. They have been lifelong friends; but now, having nothing else to do, they spend their entire time in arguing and quarreling. To one of them there comes an opportunity to leave the workhouse and be cared for in a comfortable home; but he de-

clines this opportunity because the offer is not extended also to his friend, the other pauper. Immediately afterward, the inseparable cronies fall once more to altercation, and beat each other eagerly over the head with pillows.

There is less humor and more sentiment in *The Rising of the Moon*. A constable is guarding a quay from which it is expected that a fleeing political prisoner will endeavor to escape to sea. There is a large reward upon the prisoner's head, and his apprehension would also mean promotion for the constable. An itinerant ballad-singer appears, sits back to back with the constable upon a barrel-head set lonely in the streaming of the moon, and sings him many songs which strum upon the chords of memory and remind him of his childhood and his home. Having tuned the constable to a proper key of sentiment, the ballad-singer confesses that he is the fleeing prisoner; and the constable, scarcely knowing why, connives at his escape.

In *The Gaol Gate* Lady Gregory has turned to tragedy and written in a somber mood. Outside the gate of Galway Gaol, the mother and the wife of a prisoner make lamentation, because he has, as they think, saved his own neck by betraying his companions. The Gate-keeper unwittingly contributes to this belief of theirs by telling them that the prisoner has died in hospital. He gives

them the dead man's clothes; and over these they make a melancholy keening. But later they discover that the Gate-keeper has lied to them and that the prisoner has in reality been hanged. He had not sold his friends to purchase immunity for himself: he had died gloriously, after all. And now the two women lift their voices high in praise of him, chanting the grim glory of his doom. — This little tragedy is written in a very regular rhythm; and the keening of the women reminds the ear of the forlorn falling of many of the ancient Hebrew psalms and lamentations.

Another of the Irish dramatists, named William Boyle, has displayed a great gift for humorous characterization. In his three-act comedy, *The Building Fund*, a miserly old woman is shown clinging passionately to her gathered wealth upon the very verge of death. Her son is just as miserly as she is, and has been waiting all his life for her to die. As her end approaches, he suffers a panic fear lest she may be persuaded to give a little something to his niece; and, to avert this calamity, he induces her to make a will. After her death, the parsimonious son discovers, to his consternation, that — with grim, sardonic humor — she has left all her money to the parish building fund.

The Mineral Workers, by the same author, deals with the efforts of an energetic Irishman, who has

emigrated to America and returned thence to his native township, to develop a mining company to work out a vein of copper that he has discovered in the land. He has to contend against the conservatism of the peasants, who feel that the land should be used only, as it always has been, for superficial cultivation, and the active opposition of one especially hard-headed farmer who for a long time prevents him from securing the water-rights that he needs for power. Almost every trait of Irish peasant character that militates against the advance of modern enterprise is satirically elucidated in this comedy. The plot is inconsiderable; but, as in *The Building Fund*, the humor of characterization is rich.

Mr. T. C. Murray's two-act tragedy called *Birthright* offers a revelation of a state of character rather than a resolution of a dramatic complication; but it flares up into sudden violent action at the end. It is a study of the hatred subsisting between two brothers of contrasted temperaments. The elder is an easy-going, pleasure-loving lad; the younger is more industrious and commonplace. Their father, in anger at the elder, transfers his birthright to the younger son; and this leads to a quarrel between the two brothers. There is a tragic fight by firelight; and the younger slowly strangles his elder brother with his hands.

These plays are sufficiently indicative of the materials and methods of the Irish dramatists, and represent the general level of their accomplishment. But we have still to consider the work of the one indubitable genius that the Irish National Theatre has yet given to the world.

v

There is a poem of Walt Whitman's in the course of which he says, — "O what is it in me that makes me tremble so at voices? — Surely, whoever speaks to me in the right voice, him or her I shall follow, as the water follows the moon, silently, with fluid steps, anywhere around the globe."

The first thing to be said about the dead and deathless poet, John M. Synge, is that he spoke to the world in the right voice. He wrote with an incomparable eloquence. In the rolling glory of his sentences there is a rhythm as of waters following the moon. His words are immemorial and homely, ancestral, simple, quaint; they glow with gladness as they meet each other; and eagerly they glide along in rhythms, now lilting with laughter, now languorous with melancholy, making evermore sweet music to the ear.

But Synge is a great poet not only by virtue of his noble gift of style. He deeply felt the poetry, the pathos, the tragedy, the humor, of the in-

congruity between the littleness of human actuality and the immensity of human dreams. He writes of illusions and of disillusionments. Illusions are beautiful and funny; disillusionments are beautiful and sad. Life is at once pathetic and uproarious, being, as it is, a vanity of vanities: it is at once appalling and consolatory, being, as it also is, as glorious as imagining can make it. What would one have? . . . Life, with all its faults; life, with all its virtues; there is no greater gift than life. And now that Synge is dead, we may write of him, in Mr. Kipling's words, "He liked it all!"

Synge's continual balancing of illusion against disillusionment — a weighing in which each is found wanting, and yet ennobled by a sad and funny beauty all its own — is exhibited most clearly in his three-act parable entitled *The Well of the Saints*. It would seem that the lot of Martin and Mary Doul was most unfortunate; and yet it has its compensations. Both of them are blind; they are aged, bent, and ugly; and they gather up a bare subsistence by begging at the wayside. But each of them has a dream of the world and what it looks like to those with eyes to see; and, dreaming in the darkness, they have molded an imaginable scheme of things very nearly to their heart's desire. Each of them, for instance, believes the other to be young and lovely to the

sight. They think the world unfalteringly fair, illumined by a light that never was on sea or land.

To them, contented thus in discontent, there comes a wandering friar who is able to work miracles. He anoints their eyes with holy water, and restores to them the dubious gift of sight. Martin seeks his wife among the young and glowing girls who have been gathered by the rumor of the miracle, and is startled at last to find his Mary ugly, bent, and old. Both of them find the visible world less lovely than they had imagined it to be; and they begin to long once more for the fairer vistas of the dream-illumined dark. Later on, their sight grows dim again. The miracle has been but temporary. The friar returns, to anoint their eyes once more; and he promises that this time the cure will be permanent. But Martin now prefers the visionary world of blindness, and dashes the holy water from the friar's hand.

There is a deeper poignancy in Synge's terrible and massive one-act tragedy entitled *Riders to the Sea*. Old Maurya is a mother of men; and it has been their calling to ride down to the sea with horses, to fare forth upon the sea in ships, and to be overwhelmed at last and tumbled shoreward by rolling desultory waves. Her husband, and her husband's father, and five of her strong sons, have succumbed successively to the besieging and insidious sea. Some of them have been borne home

dripping in a sail-cloth; others have been dashed unburied on forsaken coasts. Michael has only recently been washed ashore in distant Donegal. And now Bartley, the last of Maurya's living men-folk, is about to ride down to the sea. She suffers a dim foreboding, and implores him not to go; but a man has his work to do, and Bartley rides away, mounted on a gray horse and leading a red pony by the halter. His mother walks across fields to meet him by the way, so that she may give him the blessing that she had withheld when, manfully, he parted from her. But as he rides past, she sees a vision of the dead Michael riding on the red pony; and she comes home to lament the doom that is foretold. And as she is lamenting, the villagers carry to her something dripping in a sail-cloth, — the body of Bartley, the last of all her sons, whom the red pony has jolted into the aware and waiting sea. Maurya, confronted with the fact of ultimate and absolute bereavement, ceases to lament, and succumbs to an appalled serenity of acquiescence. She has lost all; and thereby she has achieved a peace that passes understanding. And thus it is she speaks at the conclusion of the tragedy: — "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . . It's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely. . . . No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied."

In the Shadow of the Glen is a grimly comic revelation of the incongruity between life as it is lived and life as it is longed for. Nora Burke has lived unhappily with her gruff and aged husband, Dan, in a lonely cottage far away among the hills. Now Dan is lying dead in bed; and when a casual tramp appears, seeking food in that far cottage, Nora tells him of the thwarted longings of the years that she has wasted. A young herdboys comes to woo her; but after he has spoken, the hated Dan sits up in bed and makes it known that his apparent death was but a sham. He orders Nora out of his house; and the timid herdboys ranks himself expediently on the husband's side. Nora goes, indeed, — but not alone; for the irresponsible and roving tramp goes with her. There is something still to seek in the adventurous and hospitable world beyond the shadow of the glen.

But Synge's masterpiece is that uproarious and splendid comedy that is greatly named *The Playboy of the Western World*. It satirizes, with poetic sympathy, the danger that besets an airy, imaginative temperament, unballasted with culture, to lose itself in divagations of extravagant absurdity. The action passes among the whimsical and dreaming peasants on the coast of Mayo. A lonely lad with a queer, fantastic strain in his soul — an essential romantic launched amid a daily

life that bewilders him with trivialities — having submitted for a long time to the tyranny of a hard-headed father who despises him, suddenly — in an impulsive moment — hits him heavily over the head and leaves him dying. He wanders, frightened and alone, for many days, and ultimately stumbles into the public-house of an isolated hamlet. Here, when he furtively tells that he has killed his father, he finds himself looked upon with an awe that soon warms to admiration. Unexpectedly — and for the first time in his life — he perceives himself regarded as a hero. This circumstance, of course, unleashes his unballasted imagination. He tells his tragic story again and yet again, embroidering the tale of persecution and revolt more and more as he repeats it, until he finds himself worshiped by all the women-folk for his spirit and his savagery. He falls in love with the daughter of the publican, who loves him in return because of his poetical and dauntless daring; and so strong is the stimulus of admiration that he wins with ease the various athletic contests that are competed in the hamlet on the morrow. But at the height of his wind-blown glory, his father enters, wounded but unkilld, with bandaged head and brandished stick, to order the boy about as in the meager years that were. The bubble of the playboy's fame is pricked; he is not a hero after all; and the simple-minded

enthusiasts who lauded him now laugh at him with scorn. This is more than he can stand. In tragical and disillusioned anguish, he once again attacks his father, — this time in the sight of all. But the very people who regarded his imagined parricide as an heroic act when they were merely told about it in romantic narrative now consider the playboy's immediate assault upon his father as a dirty deed. They noose him in a rope and are prepared to hang him; and he is saved only by the fact that his father has survived a second time. Now, "in the end of all," he has no friends; even the lass he loves has turned against him; and he is doomed to return home with his father, unappreciated in a lonely world. But he has had his little taste of glory; and he knows that henceforth he will rule his father, and "go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day."

But no summary can possibly suggest the imaginative richness of this comedy, its almost unexampled blend of poetry and humor, its rhythmic marshaling of fair and funny phrases, that echo in the ear like laughing music over waters. The man who wrote it was a great man, for verily he has spoken to us in the right voice; and when, in his noon of years, he died and went away, we "lost the only playboy of the western world."

XII

THE PERSONALITY OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

IN all the arts a distinction may be drawn between works which are objective and impersonal and works which are personal and subjective. Creations of the former type seem to have sprung full-grown from their creators' minds, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus, and to exist thereafter as independent entities; whereas creations of the latter type come trailing clouds of glory from the minds that made them. It is the merit of certain works of art that they tell us nothing of their makers; but it is no less the merit of others that they tell us a great deal. It would surely be uncatholic to exalt one type above the other; and no comparison between them should be made for any purpose less disinterested than that of definition.

All art that is inefficient is impersonal, either because the artist has no personality to reveal or because he lacks the power to reveal what personality he has; so that the distinction made above becomes valid only between the worthy works of

worthy men. Only when art has risen to the level of efficiency can the question arise whether the artist shall strive to keep himself out of his work or to put himself into it. Of these two endeavors, the former is the more admirable from the technical standpoint, but the latter is the more engaging from the standpoint of humanity.

There is no denying that the supreme and perfect works of art belong to the impersonal, objective type. We do not know who made the *Venus of Melos*, and assuredly we do not care. The nameless sculptor may have been young or middle-aged; he may have been athletic and sociable or ascetic and morose; he may have loved drink, or he may even have been a vegetarian; the *Venus* does not tell us and we do not want to know. We read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* without really caring whether Homer was a man or a syndicate of balladists. The perfect works of architecture — like the Doric temple at Pæstum, the Roman Corinthian jewel-box at Nîmes, the Sainte Chapelle at Paris or the King's College Chapel at Cambridge — are entirely impersonal: they tell us a great deal about the epoch that inspired them, but nothing about the architects who designed them. In modern fiction, the most accomplished artists have worked impersonally. Jane Austen keeps herself out of her novels; and the short-stories of Guy de Maupassant are utterly ob-

jective. What sort of man wrote *La Parure*? We may answer, "A great artist"; but that is all. So, in the drama, we find that *Ædipus King* tells us nothing about Sophocles; and though the keenest of English critics, Walter Bagehot, tried to induce a sense of Shakespeare's personality from a study of his plays, and later critics with less sound and more inventive minds have pursued this method to extravagant extremes, we notice that that one of all his plays which is the finest technical achievement — I mean, of course, *Othello* — tells us next to nothing about Shakespeare.

But if art at its most perfect is impersonal, we must admit that the obtrusion of the artist's personality in works that rank only a little lower than the highest is often an amiable imperfection. When Ulysses is discovered by the maidens of Nausicaä, it would trouble us if we had to think of the author as a blind old man; but — to take an instance of the other type — unless we do think of the author as a blind old man, we shall lose most of the poignancy and pathos of the opening of the third book of *Paradise Lost*. We prefer Chaucer to Spenser not because he is a finer artist, for he is not so fine, but because he reveals to us a more affable and human personality. Artistry, after all, is less appealing than humanity; and Addison, who is an artist, interests us less than Pepys,

who is a man. If artistry were everything, there would be no excuse for preferring the work of Giotto, who cannot draw hands and feet and whose perspective goes awry, to the work of Guido Reni, who is a practised and accomplished painter; but Giotto makes us love him so much that we overlook his inequalities of craftsmanship, and Guido bores us to such an extent by his conventional and vulgar mind that we are almost tempted to resent his skill in draughtsmanship. Mr. Howells, who is himself an objective artist and therefore an apostle of impersonality, comments adversely on Thackeray's tendency "to stand about in his scene, talking it over with his hands in his pockets, interrupting the action, and spoiling the illusion in which alone the truth of art resides" and condemns him as "a writer who had so little artistic sensibility, that he never hesitated on any occasion, great or small, to make a foray among his characters, and catch them up to show them to the reader and tell him how beautiful or ugly they were; and cry out over their amazing properties." This statement explains readily enough the grounds on which Thackeray must be regarded as a less accomplished artist than Jane Austen, or than Mr. Howells himself; but it fails to explain why most of us would rather read Thackeray. We return to *The Newcomes* again and again, not so much for the pleasure of

seeing London high society in the early nineteenth century as for the pleasure of seeing Thackeray see it; and it is precisely in those moments of amiable imperfection which Mr. Howells has stigmatized that we find ourselves nearest to Thackeray and therefore nearest to our source of pleasure. When Mr. Brownell, in his marvelous destructive criticism of the short-stories of Hawthorne, laid bare their weaknesses as works of art, he lost sight of the fact that our real reason for liking them is not because they are works of art, but because they are written by Hawthorne, and that to reveal the weaknesses of a man we love will only make us love him more. It is in this way that imperfect artists with engaging personalities get around the critics.

In the contemporary drama we are confronted by artists of the one type and the other, and it is difficult to choose between them. For instance, we have been shown a great example of objective art in *The Thunderbolt* and a great example of subjective art in *Alice Sit-By-The-Fire*; and all that may be said by the critic who would judge between them is that, although Sir Arthur Pinero is incontestably the greatest artist among contemporary English-writing dramatists, Sir James Barrie is nevertheless the best-beloved among them. The wonderful thing about Pinero's characters is their apparent independence of their creator; but

the wonderful thing about Barrie's characters is the sense they give us at all moments that they are creatures of his amiable mind. If we adopt for a moment the familiar definition of art as "life seen through a temperament," we shall notice that Pinero emphasizes the life we are looking at and that Barrie emphasizes the temperament we are looking through. All that Pinero values is the relations of his characters with each other; but Barrie values more intensely the relations of his characters with himself. Barrie appears not only as the author of his plays but also as the chief of all the auditors; he sits beside us during the performance, and nudges us or takes our hand at this moment and at that to make sure that we share his own delight at the unfolding of his comedy. But while we are looking at a play by Pinero, we feel that the author has gone home to bed and forgotten all about it. Of course Barrie's habit of taking us into his confidence would annoy us as much as Mr. Howells is annoyed by Thackeray — unless we were fond of Barrie; but as it is, we feel it a personal favor that he should come to the performance with us and let us see it through his eyes. We like Barrie; and that is the sole and all-important reason why we like to see his plays. He may make a good play, like *The Admirable Crichton*; he may make a bad play, like *Little Mary*; but we enjoy them almost equally, because

he enjoys them and has won us to enjoy what he enjoys. But in the case of an impersonal artist like Pinero, we lose interest unless he has fashioned for us an admirable work of art. When he writes *The Wife Without a Smile*, we will have none of him; and the fact that he must have liked to write it does not influence us in the least. Barrie, no doubt, is the spoiled child among our dramatists; if he chooses to construct badly, we let him have his way, for the illogical and overwhelming reason that he is Barrie and we love him. As for Pinero we cannot tell from his works whether we love him or not; all that we can tell is that we admire and appreciate his art. He keeps himself out of his plays, because, as an artist, he does not regard himself as a factor in them. Sir Arthur once told me in conversation that he personally loved the characters in *Mid-Channel* and *The Thunderbolt*; but he has carefully concealed from his public the fact that he loves them. To the average audience those twisted and exacerbated people seem unlovable; and the audience infers that, if anything, the author must have disapproved of them. But, on the other hand, Barrie parades his fondness for his characters; so that sometimes we see his fondness more clearly than we see the characters, as in looking at Andrea del Sarto's paintings of Lucrezia we see his wife less vividly than we see the haze of sentiment with

which he haloed her. In actual experience, all canons of art or lack of art fall down before the potency of personality. After years of technical analysis have convinced us that Burke writes great prose and Lamb writes imperfect prose, we find ourselves returning again and again to the *Dissertation on Roast Pig* (although we have no interest in the origin of cookery) and to *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist* (although in these days of Auction Bridge we have lost interest in the simpler game), merely because Charles Lamb is stammering and chortling through them and — we love Charles Lamb. The appeal of personality is unreasonable, and therefore as irresistible as the love of woman; and criticism, in dealing with personal, subjective works, must therefore cast reason to the winds and estimate only the affection they evoke.

XIII

THEMES AND STORIES ON THE STAGE

I

IN olden fairy-tales we read of many honorable souls condemned to dwell in cramped and crooked bodies, and we also read of many goodly bodies that walk the world untenanted by any soul. These fables lay a finger on one of the monstrous ironies of life. It would seem to our finite minds that if the creative spirit of the universe were at all reasonable in its workings it would clothe a fine soul with a fair body and use a foul body as the tenement of an evil soul; but this harmony is seldom to be seen in actual creation. The wicked Mary Stuart looks the loveliest of women; the serene, sagacious Socrates wears a funny face; and very few people enjoy, like John Keats, the privilege of looking like themselves. Seldom does the soul fit the body, or the body fit the soul; and this might almost be imagined as a reason for that disassociation known as death.

What is true of human beings is also true of works of art; for any genuine work of art, be-

cause it is a living thing, may be imagined to have a body and a soul. Sometimes, as in the case of the poems of Walt Whitman or the paintings of El Greco, the soul is finer than the body; sometimes, as in the case of the paintings of Andrea del Sarto or the poems of Poe, the body is fairer than the soul; but very rarely are the two of equal beauty, as in the supreme poem of Dante and the supreme painting of Leonardo.

The soul of a play is its theme, and the body of a play is its story. A play may have a great theme and an inadequate story, or an interesting story and scarcely any theme at all: it may be a noble-minded hunch-back or a shallow-pated Prince Charming; but only a few great plays reveal profound, important themes beneath the lineaments of engaging and enthralling stories.

By the theme of a play is meant some principle, or truth, of human life — such a truth as might be formulated critically in an abstract and general proposition — which the dramatist contrives to convey concretely to his auditors through the particular medium of his story. Thus, the theme of *Ghosts* is that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children, and the theme of *The Pigeon* is that the wild spirits and the tame spirits of the world can never understand each other. Granted a good theme, a playwright may invent a dozen or a hundred stories to embody it;

but the final merit of his work will depend largely on whether or not he has succeeded in selecting a story that is at all points worthy of his theme.

As an instance of the desired harmony between the two we may point to *A Doll's House*, which succeeds in illustrating Whitman's maxim that "the soul is not more than the body" and "the body is not more than the soul." The theme of this modern tragedy was thus formulated by Ibsen in a note penciled on the back of an envelope in Rome on October 19, 1878: "There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience — one in man, and another, altogether different, in woman. They do not understand each other; but in practical life the woman is judged by man's law, as though she were not a woman but a man. . . . A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view." This thesis is the soul of *A Doll's House*: its body is merely a story setting forth an instance of the commonplace crime of forgery. Yet this instance is so skilfully selected that the story develops naturally and inevitably to that astounding final dialogue which incorporates the essence of the theme and seems not of an age but of all time. Here is a story that is eminently adequate to the occa-

sion that called it forth; and yet it is conceivable that Ibsen might have invented an entirely different narrative to carry and deliver the message of his drama.

That the playwright's range of possible invention is almost limitless is proved by the fact that the same theme has often served as the basis of several great plays, by different authors, whose stories have shown no obvious resemblance to each other. Thus, the theme of *Macbeth* is that vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself will fall on the other side; and this is also the theme of *The Master-Builder*, which tells a very different story. Likewise *Hamlet* and *L'Aiglon*, which are unlike in narrative details, are identical in theme — the essential basis of each being the failure of a man of poetic and reflective temperament to cope with circumstances that demand a man of action.

In view of the wide range of possible invention, it is surprising that so many of our playwrights fail to devise stories that are worthy to incorporate their themes. No other source of failure in the theatre comes more often to the fore. An instance of this inadequacy is offered by the recent play called *Milestones*, by Messrs. Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblauch. The soul of this piece is a great theme — namely, that "crabbèd age and youth cannot live together," because youth is always radical and forward-looking and

age is always backward-looking and conservative; but its body is merely a sedentary, unimportant story that deals with such a minor problem as whether ships should be built of wood or iron or steel, and such an ordinary question as who shall ultimately marry whom. And because of the inadequacy of its narrative, the critic who envisages the theme of *Milestones* must regard the finished fabric as less impressive than the authors should have made it.

Sometimes, but more rarely, the contrary fault may be exhibited in the theatre. There is a type of play that commands attention by its cleverness of plot and its deft manipulation of suspense and of surprise, without revealing any central and essential theme or conveying any general truth of life for the auditor to add to his experience. Such a play may succeed for the moment, but it is not likely to live in after years. For (to return to our former statement) a work of art is like a human being; and nothing can survive of either but the soul. As Browning remarked, with sardonic truthfulness — "The soul, doubtless, is immortal — where a soul can be discerned." Generations breathe and eat and laugh and love and die; but only those few men remain immortal who leave their souls behind them. If a man shall say, not merely with his mouth but with the entire mood and meaning of his living,

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty" or "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," the world must evermore remember the life of which this message was the theme; but it easily forgets the million men whose inexpressive dust returns to dust. So it is with plays. Those that succeed in saying something have earned an opportunity to live; but those that say nothing must suffer, sooner or later, the iniquity of oblivion. A good story is necessary in order that a play may attain an immediate success; but a great theme is necessary in order that it may require the attention of posterity.

II

It would not be possible for anybody to devise an utterly new story for a play. The dramatic material in life is limited. According to certain critics, the number of different dramatic situations is a little more than thirty; according to others, it is a little less than twenty; but all are agreed that the number is extremely small. Novelty in the drama can therefore be attained not by the discovery of new materials, but only by the invention of new combinations of materials that are as old as man.

Yet the invention of new combinations affords ample scope for the exercise of ingenuity. The range of imaginable numbers is not limited by

the fact that all may be recorded with the ten digits of the Arabic notation; nor does the world in springtime look monotonous in color because every apparent tint may be regarded as exhibiting a permutation of red and blue and yellow. The twenty or thirty standard situations may be shuffled and dealt into innumerable plots, each of which is new though all of its component parts are old.

A play appeals in two ways to an audience. In so far as its component situations are traditional, it calls forth the response of recognition, and in so far as its compounded plot is novel it stimulates the reaction of surprise. In considering these two appeals, we must remember always that the emotion of recognition is more profound, and therefore more enjoyable, than the titillation of surprise. The best part of our enjoyment in the theatre arises not from vainly wondering what will happen, but from eagerly wanting some specific thing to happen and having our want fulfilled. A noticeable novelty, even in the combination of materials that in themselves are thoroughly familiar, is therefore not always to be praised as a merit in a play, but may often be regarded as a fault.

But if originality of subject-matter is impossible, and if originality of arrangement is often undesirable, why should we care to see new plays

instead of old? Why should we see *The Liars*, which treats the same theme as *Le Misanthrope*? The answer seems a paradox; but undeniably our enjoyment arises from the fact that the very antiquity of the author's materials emphasizes his originality of mind.

Any club-member can bear witness that the same anecdote may seem dull if told by one narrator and highly humorous if recounted by another. In the theatre, the ultimate significance of any story is proportioned to the importance of the mind through which it passes to the audience. The trial of Shylock, and the subterfuge by which Portia confutes him, would seem silly stuff indeed if it were told us by a child of ten; but it does not seem silly as told to us by Shakespeare. It is the author's attitude of mind toward his material, the intelligence with which he regards it, the mood that it awakens in him, that renders his work distinct from that of any other author who has used the same material, and stamps it an original creation.

It is a significant fact that the three greatest dramatists of the world — Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Molière — eschewed the invention of new narrative and exercised their high originality of mind in the treatment of stories with which their public had been long familiar. The critic, therefore, should never condemn a playwright be-

cause his story is old; but he may reasonably expect the author to illuminate the narrative with ideas and moods that shall be new because they are essentially his own. "I take my own where I find it," said Molière; and whatever he took he made his own by the divine right of thinking more deeply about it than the man from whom he took it. Sir Arthur Pinero, in *The Thunderbolt*, employed the stale old story of the stolen will; but he set it forth with a soundness of sense and a poignancy of sensibility that made it seem original and new.

Any dramatic story belongs ultimately, not to the man who used it first, nor even to the man who used it last, but to the man who has used it best. In reviewing new plays with old stories, the critic should inquire whether or not the author has afforded new illumination to the ancient drift of narrative. If so, he has really made the traditional material his own; but otherwise he has merely wasted attention by a meaningless repetition.

XIV

PLAUSIBILITY IN PLAYS

A PLAY can scarcely succeed in the theatre unless, during the two hours' traffic of the stage, the particular audience it appeals to believes the story that it tells; and no piece can be considered an important contribution to dramatic literature unless, upon a critical examination, it proves itself to have been conceived and conducted in accordance with the admitted laws of life. The first question that must be asked of any play that appeals for popularity is, "Is it plausible?": and the only and all-inclusive question that must be asked of any play that bids for more than passing commendation is the question, "Is it true?"

There are innumerable plays that pass the first test successfully and then falter before the second. So long as an audience is gathered in the theatre, it offers to the playwright the advantage of a crowd's credulity; and the actors, by sincerity of art, may charitably cover up a multitude of sins upon the author's part. It is only afterward, when the crowd has disintegrated into its

individual components, and these individuals have escaped from the immediate influence of the actors' personal appeal, that, in many cases, it becomes possible to perceive, in retrospect, that the dramatist has trifled with the laws of life; and, as a gambling chance, the playwright is warranted in figuring that very few people will analyze his effort intellectually after they have left the theatre. Not ultimate truth, but only immediate plausibility, is all he needs to master if his ambition is set only on success.

But momentary plausibility is no antidote against the opium of time; and the world will consent to remember the plays of yesteryear only when they have told unfalteringly some truth of human life which was eminently worth the telling. For Truth is the talisman we all are seeking in that running toward the rainbow's foot which is our little life upon this planet; and we are very busy in the running, and cannot pause for long to listen to tales that are not true. Even plausibility itself we are willing to discard, if the un-plausible may symbolize for us some nearer revelation of reality. *The Blue Bird* is not a plausible representation of experience; yet it is eternally, immortally true. To tell the truth is a very difficult and delicate task, far heavier than moving mountains; and truth often may be told more lucidly by some dreamful alteration of the unrevelatory terms

of actuality. Often we are voyaging in search of some treasure island buried beyond our actual horizon; and to see it we need the mystic aid of a mirage. The poetic drama is a telescope, through which we may look at truths so high that, without its aiding intervention, they would remain invisible; and for that imaginative searching of the skies there are cryptic astronomic principles which transcend the ordinary rules of criticism.

At present, in considering only the need for plausibility in the ordinary play, we must make a certain reservation in favor of the dramatist. We must permit him to begin with almost any premise, and we must allow him to end as he conveniently can; provided that, during the course of his narrative itself, he does not impose any undue tax on our credulity. Any work of art is a conventional patterning of certain selected details of nature; and the convention must be most apparent in the beginning of the work and in the end. For life itself is a continuous sequence of causation: it shows no absolute beginnings and no utter ends. Nothing in life is initiatory, nothing is conclusive. Not even birth is a beginning; for the shadowy and disconcerting science of heredity teaches us to regard it as only an incident in the progress of the race. Not even death is final; for no monumental tombstone can hold an influence quiescent,

and our slightest actions vibrate in ever-widening circles through incalculable time. But a play, by the conditions of its representment, must have a beginning and an end. It derives its possibility of existence from an initial and a terminal falsification of the admitted facts of nature. Hence we must pardon the playwright for any necessary cutting of the Gordian knot of his structure at the close; and we may pardon him also for starting his narrative with a posture of circumstances that is scarcely plausible. The one thing that we may not pardon is a violation of plausibility during the progress of the action from the conventional starting-point to the conventional termination. We will grant him his own conditions at the outset, provided that he shall remain faithful to the legitimate requirements of those conditions until the time comes for him to empty the theatre and send us home. He may end his play with a wedding, and delude us with the amiable fiction that marriage is an end instead of a beginning, provided that he has led up to the marriage through a logical development of motives; and he may begin with a staggering impossibility, as Sophocles began in *Œdipus King* or Goldsmith began in *She Stoops to Conquer* (to mention two great plays as far apart as possible in mood), provided that thereafter, when we have granted the conditions precedent to the action,

he shall rigorously tell the truth that is necessitated by those conventional conditions. In other words, it may be formulated as a practical rule that a playwright should gather whatever impossibilities may lie latent in his story into that section of the entire narrative that is conceived to have occurred before the play begins. We are willing to accept an antecedent unplausibility, because it is merely stated to us in conventional expository lines; but we refuse to accept a subsequent unplausibility, because we have to watch it being acted out before our very eyes upon the stage. A playwright may begin by asking us to concede (for the sake of the entertainment he is about to offer us) that two is equal to four; but he must afterward adhere logically to the inference that four is equal to eight and eight is equal to sixteen. If he subsequently tells us that four is equal to nine, we shall immediately revolt from the convention of credulity and reject his narrative as unbelievable.

XV

INFIRMITY OF PURPOSE

MANY modern plays which set forth interesting subject-matter and contain several admirable scenes fail of their totality of artistic effect because of an apparent infirmity in the author's purpose. Unless the writer knows at every moment precisely what sort of effect he desires to produce, and can communicate by contagion a clear sense of this precision of purpose, he will muddle the auditor's mind in its endeavor to follow him. If, in the course of a single composition, he mixes up his types, his moods, his styles, in a discordant manner, he will disperse the attention of the auditor and perplex the latter's faculty for unperturbed enjoyment. It is true, of course, that the modern playwright need not always be actuated by a single aim — his play, perhaps, will be all the better if he is not — but there should always be apparent in his purpose what may be called a harmony of aims. But very few of the plays that get themselves produced are harmonious from the outset to the end. Nearly all of them obtrude some jarring note, some dis-

cord in the pattern. The reason for this may be undoubtedly referred to an infirmity in the author's faculty of attention on the business in hand. The hardest task on earth is to fix one's mind on anything and hold it fixed; and perhaps our playwrights should be pardoned, therefore, for a little wavering.

This infirmity of purpose may show itself in any of three ways: — first, in a mixture of types; second, in a mixture of moods; or third, in a mixture of styles. These three defects we may discuss in order.

A playwright should always know pretty definitely whether he means to write a farce, a comedy, a melodrama, or a tragedy. Furthermore, he should communicate his purpose early to the audience, and should cling to it throughout the traffic of the stage. This assertion is not offered *a priori*, as an academic axiom; but it is derivable from a study of the practice of the surliest artists. The entire tone of a dramatic composition must result from the author's sense of the type of task that he is dealing with; and unless this sense be definite, the tone will be disrupted into discords. It is, of course, possible, and desirable, to effect certain combinations of types in the course of a single composition; but the number of possible combinations is limited. It is, for instance, natural for farce to stiffen

into melodrama, since in both of these types the plot controls the characters; but it is not natural for farce to mellow into emotion or deepen into tragedy. Comedy can quite naturally flower into the poetry of sentiment, but it cannot attain the thrill of melodrama without sacrificing the autonomy of its characters. Tragedy will not mix with farce, though it may accentuate itself with comedy; and it disrobes itself of all its sacred vestments when it descends to melodrama. As principles, these abstract statements (and other corollaries of them which we need not take the time to analyze) seem sufficiently self-evident; and yet the critic often finds them violated by our playwrights, and always to the detriment of the artistic fabric.

It is much more difficult to determine to what extent an author may successfully attempt a mixture of moods; for this problem — unlike the problem of a mixture of types — is not based upon an abstract logic, but solely on the author's sense of the degree to which he may depend upon his audience to follow him. Since the normal audience has differed in different ages of the drama, we may best appreciate this problem if we look upon it in historical review.

The ancients very simply solved the problem of a mixture of moods by dodging it entirely. The Greeks were (at any chosen moment) a single-

mooded people; and the Romans, who emulated them, were assiduous to imitate their singleness of mood. In the ancient drama we note always a sharp and clear distinction between the serious and the comic, with no admission of a possible commingling of the two. Any ancient play strikes at the very outset the note of that sole mood in which it is conceived, and thereafter concerns itself singly with the broadening and deepening of this invariable mood. If we are given the first few speeches of an Attic tragedy or a Roman comedy, we shall perceive at once what may be called the humour of the entire play. The ancients seem to have felt one way at one time and another at another; but the art that they have left us affords no indication that they allowed themselves to feel two different ways at once.

But this latter complexity of mood seems to have become the dominant and definitive feature of the medieval mind. The contrast may be observed at a glance if we compare the architecture of the Greeks with the architecture of the Goths. Any Greek temple exhibits the serene unfolding of a single mood; but any Gothic cathedral exhibits an antithetic unfolding of a dual mood, at the same time solemn and hilarious. Gargoyles grin at placid saints on the façades of Gothic churches; and sanctity looks back on blasphemy with no dismay. It was this sharp an-

tithesis of mood that Calderon and Shakespeare, who were writing for auditors of medieval mind, strove to attain in the glorious age of Spanish, and the spacious age of English, drama. Even in a solemnly religious play, like *The Devotion of the Cross*, Calderon carries on the action by the aid of a *gracioso*, or clown; and the Elizabethan habit of commingling the funny and the grim is too familiar to require comment.

When, at last, in 1830 (owing to a curious concatenation of historic circumstances) the future destiny of the dramatic art was placed for the moment in the hands of Victor Hugo, this giant had before him, on the one hand, the example of Corneille and Racine, who had imitated the ancients in their singleness of mood, and, on the other hand, the example of Shakespeare, who had agreed with the medieval desire for a commingling of contrasted moods. In the *Preface to Cromwell*, Hugo cast his lot with Shakespeare; and thereafter, in his preachment and his practice, he pleaded for a representation of that vast and meaningful antithesis between the grotesque and the sublime which he regarded as the greatest mood of drama.

But the problem has become more delicate since the days of Victor Hugo. If the note of ancient life was singleness of mood, and the note of medieval life was a contrast of two moods, the

note of our modern life has become an intricacy of many moods. Our existence is the most complex that has ever yet emerged in the history of mankind; and, quite naturally and indeed inevitably, our art (whose purpose is to represent our life) is more complex than that of any earlier age. We no longer write plays which exhibit either the gradual intensification of a single mood or a sharp and vivid contrast of two antithetic moods: our purpose is, rather, to exhibit a multiplicity of moods, through the medium of an artistry that is more intricate than that of any former period.

This imposes on our modern playwrights an extraordinary task of orchestration. They may deal with any number and variety of moods, provided that they can modulate them into harmony: but the very freedom of this orchestration makes it the more difficult for them to avoid disrupting discords. It would, for instance, be a discord if a serious love-scene were ever introduced as the climax of a William Collier farce; and the critic must compliment Mr. Collier for his astuteness in refusing to attempt such a scene. But this error often shows its head in the course of our contemporary plays. For instance, in Mr. Alfred Sutro's comedy, *The Perplexed Husband*, there is a scene of serious sentiment at the third curtain-fall which quite disrupts the mood of playful ban-

ter in which the composition, for the most part, is conceived.

What moods will mix harmoniously and what will not is a question that each playwright must determine for himself. Whether or not his play will strike a discord must depend upon the temper of his audience; and he must therefore be very sure, before attempting an airy shift from one mood to another, that his audience will follow him without effort. Our storehouses are packed with the scenery of plays which have failed merely because of an impossible or injudicious mixture of moods. In this regard, therefore, it behooves our playwrights to attack their tasks with an artistic purpose that shall remain unfalteringly firm.

A more obvious error is a mixture of styles during the course of a single composition. Having hit a certain key of writing at the outset of his dialogue, the author should maintain this to the end. An instance of the violation of this principle which will be readily remembered occurred in the course of Mr. James Forbes's interesting study of *The Chorus Lady*. The first two acts of that diverting drama were written in a delectable slang; but the curtain-fall of the third act (at which the innocent heroine was discovered at midnight in the villain's rooms) was written in the conventional rhetoric of melodrama.

Slang and rhetoric will not associate on friendly terms; and a play that is written in two styles will not produce upon the auditor an impression of happiness and peace. Stevenson, in several letters written during the composition of *The Beach of Falesá*, has commented on the difficulty of clinging to a certain tone of style and never writing off the key; and this difficulty may be regarded as one of the surest tests of a playwright's firmness of purpose.

XVI

WHERE TO BEGIN A PLAY

IF we look at a procession in the street, we can see easily, at any moment, only three blocks of it, though we may remember what has gone before and may imagine what is to come after. And if we were commissioned to take one photograph, and only one, of the parade, we should have to select that single brief period of its passage which was at the same time most interesting in itself, most reminiscent of all that had preceded, and most suggestive of all that was to follow.

Any story of human life that is worth telling in a novel or a play must concern itself with a procession of events that in reality is limitless; but the novelist, restricted to a few hundred pages, or the dramatist, restricted still more rigidly to the two or three hours' traffic of the stage, can exhibit only a brief and bounded picture of the eternal sequence of causation and result. To state the problem more simply, — a novel or a play must assume a beginning and an end; but life itself knows neither. Any actual

event is, in the inspired phrase of Whitman, "an acme of things accomplished and an encloser of things to be": it is at once the result of innumerable antecedent causes and the motive of innumerable subsequent results: and to dream our way backward or forward over the procession of events of which it is a momentary incident must lead us soon to lose our minds in mystery, before the dawn or later than the dusk of imaginable time. With this eternal panorama of experience, our concrete art can cope only by halting the procession at some particularly interesting moment and catching a sudden picture that shall look a little beyond, in both directions, the single incident on which the camera is focused.

Just as different pictures of the same procession in the street may be chosen by photographers who snap their cameras at different moments, so various stories might be selected from the same procession of events by novelists or playwrights who should pick out different moments to begin and end their narratives. Any story, to attract and to enthrall attention, must exhibit the crisis, or climax, of a series of events; but the individual artist is left at liberty to determine how far before this crisis he shall set the initiation of his narrative and how far beyond it he shall set the end. If he is interested mainly in causes, he will choose to depict in detail the events that lead up

to his climax; and if he is interested mainly in effects, he will prefer to devote the major share of his attention to those subsequent events that are occasioned by his crisis. Thus we discover in practice two types of narratives,—in one of which the main events look forward and are interesting chiefly as causes, and in the other of which the main events look backward and are interesting chiefly as results.

We may select for purposes of illustration the subject-matter of *The Scarlet Letter*. The crisis, or climax, of this imaginary train of incidents is the adultery of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. Hawthorne has chosen to start his story at a moment subsequent to the occurrence of this crisis and to devote his attention entirely to a study of the after-effects of the committed sin on the souls of the three characters concerned; but it is conceivable that another novelist—George Eliot, for instance—might have begun the story many years before and might have chosen to deal mainly with the causes that culminated in the crisis that Hawthorne has assumed as a condition precedent to his narrative. Thus we see that two stories wholly different in plot might be derived from the same procession of events, according as the novelist should choose to begin his narrative late or early in the sequence of causation.

Undoubtedly—in the single instance we have

glanced at — Hawthorne began his narrative after the crisis because *The Scarlet Letter* was his first novel and he had been writing short-stories for over twenty years. Naturally enough, he constructed this novel as if it were a short-story. The writer of short-stories is so strictly limited to economy of means that he must deal mainly with results and must ask the reader to assume the antecedent causes; but the novelist, with his ampler scope of narrative, may deal with causes in detail and may presume in hasty summary the subsequent results. The handling of the story of *The Scarlet Letter* which we have assigned theoretically to George Eliot is more typical of the method of the novelist than the short-story structure which was imposed upon the subject-matter by the man who gave the story to the world.

In different periods of its development, the drama has oscillated between these two extremes of treatment, and has approached either the strictness of structure that is characteristic of the short-story or the more easy amplitude of narrative that is customary in the novel. In certain periods it has concerned itself mainly with causes, and in others chiefly with results.

The structure of Greek tragedy was singularly similar to the structure of the modern short-story. There are many obvious reasons for this analogy. In the first place, the physical conditions of the

Greek theatre made it most convenient for the playwright to restrict his exhibition to a single place and to confine his action within a single revolution of the sun; and in the second place, the fact that the Greek playwright dealt only with traditional materials permitted him to presuppose, on the part of his audience, a knowledge of his entire story that should warrant him in assuming any number of incidents as having happened in imagination before the play began. Thus, at the performance of *Ædipus King*, the audience merely waited breathless while the hero discovered that appalling inheritance of the accumulated past, of which the audience was thoroughly aware before the play began. The tragedy dealt wholly with results, and not at all with causes.

The other extreme of structure is exhibited in the Elizabethan drama. In studying the plays of Shakespeare, we should remember always that nearly all of them were dramatized novels and that the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre encouraged what may be called a "novelistic" treatment of stories on the stage. Although it was only with apparent difficulty that the Greek playwright could alter the time or place of his action, the Elizabethan playwright could denote a lapse of years, or a shift of scene from one country to another, by the simple expedient of

emptying his stage and bringing other actors on to state the new conditions. Using the term "act" with its modern technical meaning, it may be said that a Greek tragedy was constructed in a single act; but a typical Elizabethan play — like *Antony and Cleopatra* — was not conceived in acts, but in an ample and uncounted sequence of half a hundred "scenes." Hence, it is not surprising that Shakespeare, like a nineteenth-century novelist, devoted more of his attention to the development of causes leading up to his crisis than to the analysis of subsequent results.

But the modern drama, reduced by its investiture of scenery to the arrangement of a story in not more than three or four distinct pigeon-holes of time and place, has returned more nearly to the Greek method of exhibiting a story in a single act than to the Elizabethan method of stretching a story out through fifty scenes. The exigencies of the modern stage apparently demand that the dramatist shall start his story at a time as late as possible in his procession of events and shall assume the necessary antecedent incidents in passages of backward-looking exposition. Thus, Ibsen's *Ghosts*, which — from the technical standpoint — is one of the very greatest of modern plays, is constructed according to the method of Sophocles instead of the method of Shakespeare. The entire narrative that is re-

counted covers nearly thirty years; and yet the actual experience that is exhibited is constricted within the compass of a few hours. And a month after we have seen the play, we remember with equal vividness those events which were disclosed upon the stage and those other events which were merely narrated in passages of retrospective exposition.

Since the average audience in any period expects the dramaturgic method to which it is habituated, it follows that the playwright looking for success should begin his story late or early in his general procession of events, according to the fashion of his time. At present it is undeniably the custom of the most highly accredited playwrights to catch a story at its climax and to build a play more out of the results than out of the causes of the crisis of the narrative. For instance, — Aubrey Tanqueray decides to marry Paula; and Pinero's play exhibits not the causes leading up to this decision but the tragic series of events resultant from it.

From these general considerations it should be evident that a playwright, in any period, may spoil a good story by beginning his play at the wrong moment and exhibiting an ill-selected section of his entire drift of incident. Ibsen — for example — spoiled the story of *Rosmersholm* by beginning his play at a point too far along in

the general procession of events; and many other plays have been spoiled by playwrights who have started their stories too far before the crisis of the narrative. Of this later type, an interesting instance is offered in *The High Road*, by Mr. Edward Sheldon.

XVII

CONTINUITY OF STRUCTURE

ONE of the most difficult problems of the modern dramatist is to map out what may be called the "time-scheme" of his play. In two hours and a half of actual acting time, he must exhibit an imaginary series of events that in reality would occupy several hours or days, or even, in some cases, many months or years; and, in presenting these events, he must contrive to suggest the impression of an uninterrupted continuity of narrative. He is aided in this task by two traditions of the drama. The first of these is the immemorial convention which allows him to assume a compression of time during the progress of an act; and the second is the more modern convention which permits him to summarize very briefly whatever may have happened in an *entr'acte*. But an injudicious application of these two conventions may lead to an apparent improbability that will violate the psychologic truth of the entire narrative; and it is therefore necessary that the modern dramatist should account very carefully for the lapse of time that is imagined between the outset of his drama and the end.

This careful accounting of time was not demanded in the drama of any period before the present. The authors of Greek tragedy, for instance, were not obliged to plan their plays with an eye upon the clock. Greek tragedy exhibited merely the accumulated effects of an antecedent series of causes stretching back through many years; and, expounding their stories retrospectively, it was not difficult for the Attic authors to confine the time-scheme of their tragedies to a single revolution of the sun. A Greek play was presented without intermission and occupied about two hours of actual acting time; but the audience was quite willing that these actual two hours should be regarded as representative of twenty hours. In other words, the Greek audience accepted the convention of a condensation of time in the ratio of ten to one. Early in the course of *Ædipus King*, a certain shepherd is sent for, and he appears upon the scene not more than half an hour afterward, although in actuality he could scarcely have been found in less than half a day; but this compression of time, in a narrative that was logically continuous, did not insult the imagination of the ancient audience.

The Elizabethan drama did not even attempt to restrict itself to a ten to one ratio in dealing with the element of time. In fact, the majority of the extant Elizabethan plays exhibit no con-

scious time-scheme whatsoever. The compositions of this period were probably acted without any intermission; and they were constructed, not in a limited number of acts, but in an unlimited number of scenes. In consequence, it would be exceedingly difficult to compute the precise number of days that are assumed to have elapsed between the first scene and the last of *Hamlet* or *As You Like It*, for example. The truth is that such a computation never occurred to the winging mind of Shakespeare. It was not at all necessary for him to work out a time-scheme of Hamlet's trip to England or to estimate the exact duration of Rosalind's wanderings in the Forest of Arden. The stage for which he built his dramas was incapable of keeping a strict account of either place or time.

The time-scheme of the drama became a little more restricted in the plays of Molière, and of his many imitators throughout the eighteenth century; but, even in this period, scarcely any account was taken of the time required for the actions of the leading characters off the stage. Throughout the history of the drama, the handling of the category of time has been inextricably intertangled with the handling of the category of place. In the eighteenth century, a room was represented by a back-drop and wings; and an actor left the room by walking through the walls.

In such a play as *The Rivals*, a character walked bodily out of the story when he left the stage, and he did not again enter into the narrative until he was once more needed on the scene. What he had been doing in the meantime, and how many hours were required for this activity beyond the limits of the stage, were not accounted for in the subsequent spectacle of narrative. The play concerned itself solely with those events that happened to the eye within the limited compass of the two hours' traffic of the stage.

But the modern drama, with its precise insistence upon localization in place, assumes an equally precise insistence upon localization in time. Whenever an actor makes an exit from a modern box-set, the audience demands to know whether he is going into an adjacent room or quitting the house; and this demand requires an explanation of how he occupies himself throughout the period that intervenes before his reappearance on the scene. Thus, the physical conditions of the modern theatre impose upon the playwright a new unity of time by demanding an accounting of the actions of his leading characters not only on, but also off, the stage.

This unity of time is very skilfully achieved in *La Flambee*, a three-act drama by the Belgian playwright M. Henry Kistemaeckers, which was presented in New York with the altered title of

The Spy. The story happens at a house-party in a baronial château. The action opens after dinner on a certain evening and closes at nine o'clock on the following morning; and the structure is so continuous that the movements of the leading characters are accounted for through every hour of the night. After reading or seeing the play, we seem to have experienced not only those incidents which happened on the stage but also all the other incidents of the story which happened off the stage between the acts. The narrative progresses even more vigorously when the curtain is down than when it is up. This extraordinary drama is in many ways a masterpiece of art; but the best of all its merits is its uninterrupted continuity of structure.

XVIII

RHYTHM AND TEMPO

THERE is one phase of the dramatic art which has rarely been discussed by critics and is scarcely ever noticed by the average theatre-goer. Everybody knows that the drama is both a visual and an auditory art, — that, by virtue of its appeal to the eye, it offers many analogies to the art of painting, and that, by virtue of its appeal to the ear through its use of spoken words, it exhibits innumerable analogies to the art of literature. But comparatively few people have ever paused to realize that the drama is also a temporal art, owing much of its appeal to its manner of punctuating passages of time, and that, by virtue of this fact, it discloses an analogy to the art of music. The merit of many dramatic scenes is resident in the sheer rhythm of their presentation and the deft manipulation of this rhythm in the tempo of the acting.

The appeal of rhythm to the human sensibilities is the very basis of the arts of poetry and music. The periodical repetition of certain beats, unassisted by any more intelligible method of ex-

pression, may stimulate the listener to an eager apprehension of emotion. To prove this, it is only necessary to cite, for the purpose of experiment, two very well-known lines of poetry. The first line is—

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces

And the other line is—

The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep

In each of these citations, I have purposely quoted only a single line, leaving the sense unfinished; for the experiment I am about to propose deals only with the rhythm of the lines and has no reference to their intelligible content. Let me now ask the reader to repeat the first line to himself a hundred times, and, after an appreciable interval, to submit himself to a similar insistence from the second line. If his mind have any ear at all, the first experiment will induce a noticeable quickening of his pulses and the second experiment will retard his pulse-beats to a less than normal tempo. In the first case, his mind will be keyed up to the apprehension of dashing and alert emotions, and, in the second, it will be attuned to the reception of emotions that are somnolent and solemn.

The psychology of this experiment sits very near the center of the art of writing; but it may,

perhaps, be illustrated more emphatically by the art of music. Every musical composer indicates not only the notes he wishes to be played but also the tempo in which he wants them to be rendered, knowing that the emotional message of his phrases may be altered utterly by a faulty retarding or acceleration of the rhythm that he has imagined. A familiar experiment is to play *Nearer, my God, to Thee* in rag-time, and thus to rob the melody of all its somber connotation. The opening bars of the *Moonlight Sonata* may be made ridiculous by playing them very rapidly, and *Anitra's Dance* may be robbed of all its gaiety by playing it very slowly: and these changes of appeal may be effected without the alteration of a single note.

The acted drama, since it is doomed to present a pattern of details in time, is subject to the same psychologic law which haunts these other temporal arts of poetry and music. Certain scenes can be properly effective only if they are played in very rapid tempo, and certain other passages can easily be ruined by an ill-advised acceleration of the acting. The consideration of this fact results in certain rules which must be followed by the playwright and the stage-director.

The true artist in either of these crafts senses these rules intuitively and abides by them subconsciously; and it is only when the rules of

rhythm are violated that the observer becomes at all aware of the reality of their subsistence. A dramatic passage often requires a series of very subtle modulations in the rhythm of its presentation; and if it be enacted crudely, with invariable tempo, the observer will receive an impression of indefinite distress, like that which comes of hearing a Neapolitan song played solely with the feet upon a pianola.

Only the most obvious rules of rhythm for the drama may be set down in uncompromising print, like the axioms of Euclid. For instance, it is obvious that most melodramas should be played very rapidly, in order to stimulate excitement and also to rob the audience of any opportunity to question the plausibility of the situations; and it is equally obvious, upon the other hand, that most tragic scenes should be enacted slowly, in order to give the audience time to accumulate a sense of the imminence of doom before the fateful lines are spoken. The majority of farces demand a very rapid rendering, and the acceleration of the acting needs to be increased in proportion as the farcical material treads closer on the heels of the ridiculous; but a comedy that depends for its effect on the subtle revelation of character through humorous dialogue must usually be played with frequent pauses, in order to give the audience time to develop thoughtful laughter. Such

elementary principles as these may be formulated and set down as axioms; but, just as poetry and music attain their best effects by subtle variations in rhythm and modulations of tempo, so also the finest effects in the theatre are not infrequently achieved by momentary modifications of an expected time-scheme in the acting.

For the manipulation of such effects as these, the stage-director is finally responsible. This functionary has often been compared with the leader of an orchestra. He establishes the tempo in which a composition shall be rendered, and may often make or mar it by the mere direction of its rhythm. But the dominance of the stage-director does not relieve the playwright of responsibility in this regard. An orchestral composer who should hand a score to his conductor without any indication of the tempo of his leading passages would be deemed an inefficient artist; and any playwright who plans an act without establishing its rhythm in advance sets himself similarly in the class of incomplete composers. In the plotting of his business and in the writing of his lines, he should make it easy for his stage-director to arrange the rapidity or sluggishness of rhythm that is required to reinforce the emotional content of his scene. To ask his actors to sit still at a moment when the action should be hurried, to require them to speak in anapests while they are

listening in fear to the tardy ticking of a clock, — these are errors which impose upon the stage-director a task which is unfortunately difficult.

This matter should be studied very carefully by all aspirants to the art of dramaturgy. A simple exercise may be suggested for the benefit of readers who desire ultimately to write plays or to direct them. Let them take a scene from *Hamlet* and another from *The Thunderbolt* and ask themselves precisely how rapidly or slowly these passages should be played in order to achieve their best effect upon the stage. Let them, if necessary, experiment with a metronome until they get the rhythm right. Subsequently, in attending the performances of successful current plays, these studious spectators will be better enabled to appreciate to what a great extent their appeal has been enhanced by a deft manipulation of the rhythm of their presentation.

XIX

THE PLAYS OF YESTERYEAR

IN the eleventh chapter of *Other Days*, by Mr. William Winter, — a wistfully pathetic volume in which the author eloquently recollects the high delight he used to take in going to the theatre half a century ago, — the following statements may be found: “It is undeniable that the condition of the American Stage, at present, is unsatisfactory to persons who possess judgment, knowledge, and taste. . . . The pendulum, — which is always swinging, — has swung backward. The character of the Theatre has deteriorated, and there has been a corresponding deterioration in the character of its followers. . . . The immediate point is that the present day happens to be a day of theatrical decline. There has not been a time in the history of the American Stage when the Theatre received so much attention as it receives now, from the Public and the Press, and there has not been a time when the quality of its average presentments so little deserved the respect of intellect and judicious taste. . . . The theatrical audience of this period is

largely composed of vulgarians, who know nothing about art or literature and who care for nothing but the solace of their common tastes and animal appetites: on that point observation of the faces and manners of the multitude would satisfy any thoughtful observer. . . . The stage has 'fallen on evil days.' The pendulum may swing forward again, by and by, and the tide may rise again, but no indications are now visible that a change for the better is near at hand."

If these statements were true, no consideration in the world could tempt the present commentator to waste his evenings in so degenerate a theatre, nor to waste his mind in the analysis of such insignificant material. But Mr. Winter's statements are not true. The truth of the matter is that there has never been another time within its century of history when the American Theatre has been patronized by so many "persons who possess judgment, knowledge, and taste," nor when so many new plays have been presented every year which "deserved the respect of intellect and judicious taste." The pendulum is swinging forward with a tidal chant; and the quality of our dramatic art and the judgment of our audiences have risen steadily for fifty years and now are rising more rapidly than heretofore.

Mr. Winter's disparagement of the contemporary theatre-going public is sufficiently disproved

by the civic success of Mr. Richard Bennett's recent production of *Damaged Goods*, a translation by John Pollock of the famous work of Eugène Brieux entitled *Les Avariés*. This piece was not intended as an entertainment: it is a clinical disquisition upon one of the most terrible of civic sores by the greatest living Professor of Social Hygiene. The purpose and the method of the preachment may best be indicated by the following words, which were composed by the author to be spoken as a prologue at the first and only presentation of the piece in Paris in 1902: — "The object of this play is a study of the disease of syphilis in its bearing on marriage. It contains no scene to provoke scandal or arouse disgust, nor is there in it any obscene word; and it may be witnessed by every one, unless we must believe that folly and ignorance are necessary conditions of female virtue."

The interest of this work is wholly intellectual; and since it offers no allurements to the prurient, and no entertainment to the idle-minded, one might have supposed that it would have appealed only to a small and special audience. It was first presented in New York at two private matinées, held under the auspices of the Sociological Fund of the *Medical Review of Reviews*; but, in response to a general and undeniable demand, it has since been offered to the public as a regular attraction

may be a good enough translation

THE PLAYS OF YESTERYEAR 197

in all the leading cities of this country. In the first six weeks of its run at the Fulton Theatre in New York, over fifty thousand people witnessed the production; over fifty thousand people paid their money to listen to a lecture by the most earnest-minded dramatist of contemporary France.

This phenomenon seemed of sufficient importance to the present commentator to induce him to look in at the performance of *Les Avariés* on four or five occasions. Could it be possible, one wondered, that so eager an audience could be — in Mr. William Winter's words — “largely composed of vulgarians”? . . . On each occasion, the first hasty “observation of the faces and the manners of the multitude” was completely reassuring. The theatre housed no smutty-minded idlers. Such spectators as admire the half-dressed chorus of the Ziegfeld *Follies* were conspicuously absent. The auditorium was filled to the final row with people who looked like those who habitually furnish audiences for the great Free Lecture System of the Board of Education. They were earnestly eager to inform themselves of “the best that is known and thought in the world.” Perhaps the majority of the auditors were men, — the sort of men who toil in Social Settlements to ameliorate the lot of their less lucky fellow-citizens; but it was, upon the

whole, more interesting to observe the women in the audience. They were the sort of women who teach school, or work in other worthy ways to support the society that supports them. The type of woman who meekly allows herself to be kept by her father or her husband and offers the world no intellectual return for the energy that is expended to maintain her in a desuetude that is at best innocuous seemed scarcely to figure in the audience. Many of the women auditors were young; and it was gratifying to observe that they listened to the lecture of the great Brieux without a simper or a blush. They would have denied indignantly that "folly and ignorance are necessary conditions of female virtue"; and they went away informed of many important facts which otherwise might not have been brought to their attention.

Would Mr. William Winter venture to maintain that such an audience as this could possibly have been assembled, for six weeks running, in any theatre of New York half a century ago?

Mr. Winter's other contention, that "there has not been a time in the history of the American Stage when the quality of its average presentments so little deserved the respect of intellect and judicious taste," can, fortunately, be disproved with equal ease. In recent years it has become

the custom of many managers to devote the spring season to the revival of old plays; and several of the pieces that have thus been resurrected have cured us of any sentimental sighing for "the good old days." How lucky, on the contrary, we are, to have escaped the era of *The Lady of Lyons* and to have been born in an age when such writers as Pinero and Maeterlinck, Hauptmann and Barrie, Shaw and Sudermann, Galsworthy and Brioux, are devoting their mental energies simultaneously to the traffic of the stage!

It is surely not unfair to Mr. Winter to take the recent adequate revival of Lester Wallack's *Rosedale* as a text for considering what he has assumed as a "deterioration" in "the character of the Theatre" in America. *Rosedale* was by far the most successful play that was presented in America in the decade of the eighteen-sixties, and there seems no reason to doubt that it was one of the best plays of that epoch. In its first season, 1863, it ran for one hundred and twenty-five performances, thereby setting a new record for American theatres; and it played, at the same time, to receipts that averaged \$900 a performance, — a sum looked upon, in that period, as unprecedented and likely never to be surpassed. The piece was received with scarcely less acclaim when it was revived in 1865, 1868, 1871, and 1874. Surely it seems not unfair to accept this

enormously successful work as a representative example of the dramaturgy of its period.

Yet how does *Rosedale* look to-day "to persons who possess judgment, knowledge, and taste"? It seems, in comparison with only our second-best contemporary efforts, a mass of childish nonsense. This impression is not owing to the fact that its dramaturgic method is old-fashioned. Old fashions may be good fashions, in the theatre as in life; and a modern audience does not find it difficult to accept the immeasurably more antiquated technical devices of Molière or Shakespeare or even Sophocles. This fact was proved recently by the deep impression made upon artistic minds by the production of *The Yellow Jacket*, — a play that easily conveyed its delicious blend of poetry and humor by the uncustomary and naïve conventions of the Chinese stage. If *Rosedale* seems unsatisfactory to-day, it is not because of its soliloquies and its asides, its alternation of front and back scenes, its symmetrical balancing of character against character and mood against mood, or its dialogue of labored and artificial prose. These were merely technical conventions in Lester Wallack's day; and a reasonable mind will always accept any convention of expression for the sake of receiving the thought to be expressed. The play seems silly to us now for a deeper and a more important reason. It is silly

because it consciously and deliberately tells lies about life.

And here we set our finger on the difference between the best plays of fifty years ago and the best efforts of our drama of to-day. When Mr. Winter was a young man, people went to the theatre to be told lies about life: nowadays they go to the theatre to be told some serious and searching truth. This may seem an extreme statement; but it may be verified by anybody who will take the trouble to compare *The Lady of Lyons* — which is probably the best English play of the eighteen-thirties — with such a piece as Mr. Galsworthy's *The Pigeon* — which is only one of a dozen of the best English plays that have been written in the last few years.

The purpose of every artistic endeavor is to tell the truth; and no effort that is not actuated by this aim is worthy of the name of art. Half a century ago the drama, in the English language, had ceased to be an art; and it has resumed the responsibility and the dignity of art only in the last twenty years. In *Rosedale*, for example, no effort whatsoever was made to hold the mirror up to nature. The characters are false to life, the incidents are false to life, the plot is impossible, and the dialogue is lacking in any suggestion of veracity. But if these accusations should be fairly made against a new con-

temporary play, it would speedily be derided to oblivion.

It is an interesting fact that no one thought of urging these objections in the period when *Rosedale* was produced. No one thought, at that time, that it was the duty of the drama to endeavor to fulfil the aim of art. Otherwise this childish composition could never have been so highly vaunted at a time when Thackeray and Dickens had already accomplished their great labors and when George Eliot and George Meredith were at the height of their powers. How — unless the theatre was smilingly regarded as a realm of triviality — could any intelligent person of the eighteen-sixties read such a novel as *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and subsequently sit through such a play as *Rosedale*?

It is only lately that the drama has caught up with the novel as a medium for expressing an artistic view of life, — that is to say, a vision of life that is actuated by the high endeavor to enlarge the horizon of our understanding. The sum-total of what we know of human character has been increased by Pinero, Jones, Barrie, Galsworthy, Barker, and many other English-writing playwrights of the present period; but it seems scarcely an exaggeration to say that it was, to all intents and purposes, decreased by the playwrights of half a century ago. For, though peo-

ple must have known in 1863 that Lester Wallack was lying, his piece was so effective in the theatre as to woo them for the moment to forget that they knew better than to believe the lies he told them.

When our modern drama, in the hands of Henrik Ibsen, began anew to illuminate the world with the torch of truth, it was assailed on all sides as "immoral" by people whose minds had been drugged and drowsed by easy and amiable lies. This is the accusation that is always raised by the unilluminated multitude against the Teacher who causes the light to shine before them; and it is upon the basis of this accusation that, in every age, they crucify him. Doubtless, at the present time, there are many who would accuse Eugène Brieux of "immorality" because, in *Damaged Goods*, he has dared to wage war against that horrible conspiracy of silence which continues to submit thousands of the innocent ignorant to the infection of a devastating disease of whose nature they are unaware. But the only immorality of which art is really capable is the immorality of bearing false witness against life; and it is just as immoral to make life appear more easy than it is as to make it appear more difficult. We are learning at last that such a play as *Rosedale* is immoral, and that the most pernicious works of fiction are those that smilingly assume

what may be called a girl's-boarding-school outlook upon life. *Rosedale* is immoral because it teaches the doctrine that virtue will inevitably be rewarded and villainy will always reap discomfiture. This is an easy doctrine, but it is not true. It is immoral, also, because it teaches that all people may be divided into sheep and goats — those who are very, very good and those who are very, very bad — whereas we know that human character is so complex that no final and sweeping judgment can be passed upon the infinite entanglement of motives that leads to the lifting of a little finger. There is no soul so pure that it does not succumb occasionally to error; there is no soul so black that it does not rise occasionally to the height of human heroism. Such plays as this teach also that women are lovable in proportion to their ignorance, that all good people are handsome, that self-sacrifice is always noble, and innumerable other doctrines that are devastating to the mind. God defend us from the "sweet and wholesome" plays of yesteryear!

If we consider Lester Wallack's *Rosedale* solely from the theatrical, and not at all from the artistic, point of view, we shall not find it difficult to understand its enormous popularity in a period when the theatre was not expected to hold the mirror up to nature. Its incidents show no reasonable reference to life, but each of them

is interesting on the stage. Its characters are not related to humanity, but each of them affords the performer an opportunity to make a successful appeal to the emotions of the audience. The dialogue is stilted and unnatural, but it is studded with speeches that invite applause.

Rosedale differs from the dramas of to-day in the fact that it emphasizes the personalities of the actors, whereas our contemporary pieces emphasize the message of the author. Fifty years ago the playwright contented himself with concocting a dozen effective acting parts; but nowadays the author endeavors to say something about life, and uses his actors merely as media for the expression of his meaning. This shift of attention from the interpretative to the creative artist, from the tricks of the performer to the thoughts of the writer, has been accomplished only recently in the history of the American theatre; but not until this revolution was accomplished did our drama begin to attain the dignity of art. *Richelieu* — though it was greatly played by our supreme actor, Edwin Booth — remained, because of its inflated artificiality, a travesty of life; but *Hindle Wakes* — though it be played by nobody in particular — conveys a criticism of life that convinces us of the acuteness of Mr. Stanley Houghton's mind. In fifty years we have risen from the suits and trap-

pings of an artificial stage to a real region of ideas.

A great deal of nonsense has been said in favor of the old system of stock-companies. This system was certainly advantageous to the actors, but just as certainly it was disadvantageous to the dramatist. In writing such a play as *Rosedale*, the author's primary concern was necessarily to provide a striking part for each of a dozen performers who were expected by their special public to do over again, in the new play, the sort of work that they had already done appealingly in other parts. The story had to be stopped for three minutes to allow an admired actor, Charles Fisher, to deliver a set speech in praise of the physician's calling, though this monologue had nothing whatever to do with the story of the play; and Lester Wallack himself, in the part of the soldier-hero, could not deny himself the opportunity to halt the plot at still another point in order to tell the audience at length what a noble thing it is to be an actor. But nowadays, with no stock-company upon his hands, the author may more nearly ape the modesty of nature and project a picture of life in which the performers are not continually taking the center of the stage. A playwright of the present day may draw a servant who behaves like a servant; but in "the good old days" of the stock-company, a popular

THE PLAYS OF YESTERYEAR 207

actor who was sent on as a servant expected, at the very least, an opportunity to sing a song or to score with the audience by making impudent remarks to his employer. Every play had to contain a villain with a gruff voice, a handsome and athletic hero, a comic old man, a simpering and saccharine young lady (preferably an orphan), a self-sacrificing secondary hero, a female servant who was loudly boisterous, and (if possible) a regiment of soldiers. Every member of the stock-company had to be furnished with his special "line of business"; and life was beaten about until it surrendered to a formula. How grateful we should be for that "deterioration" of the drama in recent years that is made by Mr. Winter a theme for sentimental sighing!

XX

A NEW DEFENSE OF MELODRAMA

I

IT is the fate of many amiable words to be debased by vulgar usage until they acquire a derogatory connotation. Thus has the sweet word *homely* been deflowered; so that nowadays to assure a woman that she is homely has ceased to seem a gentle compliment. The adjective *amateur*, which in its original sense exactly defines the quality of such delicate and loving art as that of Mr. Austin Dobson or of Mr. Kenneth Grahame, has come to connote the daubing of a bungler. Anybody who labors earnestly, though only in a humble way, to fulfil the purpose of criticism — which was defined by Matthew Arnold as “a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world” — must endure the continual discouragement of hearing the word *criticism* bandied about on careless lips as if it signified an interested endeavor to discredit the nobility of art. If one may muse for a moment in the mood of Elia —

would it not be a gracious act to erect a monument to fallen words, like *censure*, *common*, *cynic*, *nice*, *mistress*, *gentleman*, to remind the present age of what they used to mean before they fell on evil days and evil tongues? . . .

In the vocabulary of theatre-goers, no word has suffered more from this iniquitous degeneration than the adjective *melodramatic*. Careless writers are now accustomed to call a play melodramatic when they wish to indicate that it is bad; whereas they might with equal logic try to damn a play by calling it tragic, or comic, or poetic. There are good tragedies and bad tragedies, good melodramas and bad melodramas; and it is no more sound to assume that all melodramas are bad than to assume that all tragedies are good. But the very word *melodrama* has so fallen into disrepute that nowadays when a man puts forth a melodrama he usually pretends that it is something else and writes in a few extraneous passages to justify his press-agent in advertising it as a social study or a comedy.

Consequently, if we are to converse with any seriousness about the noble art of melodrama, we must agree at the outset to divest the word of all derogatory connotation. Most people consider it pedantic to insist on definitions; and the minority of writers who refuse to use such an adjective as *romantic* without explaining what they mean

by it are usually labeled academic — which is supposed to be synonymous with dull. Yet a great deal of the fret and bother of the world would be averted if people in general would only educate themselves to definition. For instance, if only the socialists would agree upon a definition of *socialism* and formulate it in a single paragraph, we should all be able to determine at a glance whether or not we wanted to be socialists; and this procedure would save reformers the expense of printing innumerable pamphlets and spare us a great deal of mouthing and sawing the air.

By *melodrama* — if we use the word nicely — is signified a serious play in which the incidents determine and control the characters. There are, to be sure, a few other abiding features of melodrama that should be accounted for in any final definition of the form, and these we shall consider in due time; but for the present this primary principle will serve to convince us that melodrama not only has an excuse for being but is in reality one of the noblest types of art. In both tragedy and comedy the characters control the plot; in farce, as in melodrama, a train of incidents is foreordained and the characters are subsequently woven into the pattern of destiny that has been predetermined for them; and it is clearly reasonable for us to accept that convention of criticism which regards tragedy and comedy as more

heroic than their sister arts. But life itself is more frequently melodramatic than tragic and much more often farcical than comic; in fact, the utter dominance of character over coincidence is so rare in the record of humanity as to call for chapter-headings in our histories; and since the purpose of the drama — like that of all the other arts — is to represent the truth of life, the theatre must always rely on farce and melodrama to complete its comment on humanity. Much of our life — in fact, by far the major share — is casual instead of causal. As Stevenson remarked, in his *Gossip on Romance*, “The pleasure that we take in life is of two sorts — the active and the passive. Now we are conscious of a great command over our destiny; anon we are lifted up by circumstance, as by a breaking wave, and dashed we know not how into the future.” It is not granted to many of us to realize with any constancy that boast of Henley’s and to regard ourselves as masters of our fate or captains of our soul; for nearly all the good or ill that happens to us is drifted to us, uncommanded, undeserved, upon the tides of chance. It is this immutable truth — the persistency of chance in the serious concerns of life and the inevitable influence of accident on character — that melodrama aims to represent: and to damn melodrama as an inconsiderable type of art is to deny the divinity of Fortune, whom

the wisest of all men, in the seventh canto of his *Hell*, exalted "with the other Deities."

II

It is because melodrama casts its emphasis on incident instead of character that it has been in every age the most popular of all the types of drama. Each of us is avid of adventure; and to find ten dollars in the street strikes us as more interesting than to earn ten dollars by accomplishing our share in the established division of labor. Similarly — though in this we are not logical — it strikes us as more interesting to be gagged and bound, and rescued by the provident police, than to quarrel with our wife or husband over the duration of the boiling of an egg and to purchase forgiveness by the gift of an ostrich feather or a box of trust-made but untrustworthy cigars. Though in our waking senses we may condemn that Deity whose name is Fortune, we all worship her in dreams; and in the theatre we bless the happy chance that agreeably rewards the innocent and consigns the villainous to jail.

In our own lives, we remember what has happened to us, by some lucky or unlucky accident, more vividly than we remember what we were: our past selves are clouded with oblivion, but our past adventures float before the eyes of memory as stories instant and alive. So, in our experience

of theatre-going, we forget characters — like Hedda Gabler — but we remember incidents — like that moment in *The Two Orphans* when the lost Louise is heard singing in the street and the incarcerated Henriette is stopped at the door by the entering guards while she hears her sister being dragged unwillingly away to a continuance of beggary. Adventure moves us more than character; because adventure is always with us — it is often an adventure to look over the edge of our morning paper at the person seated opposite in the subway — but character is an element of destiny of which we grow aware only in the small minority of incidents which are commanded and controlled.

And there is another point which explains the popularity of melodrama; and that is that, since the characters are not rigidly defined, we experience no difficulty in putting ourselves in the positions of the characters and imagining that what is happening upon the stage is happening to us. We observe the clearly drawn characters of tragedy with a conscious aloofness that is, to some degree, discomfiting. Hedda Gabler interests us merely as a specimen; and what happens to her does not in any real sense happen to us. The fact of what she is convinces us that she must ultimately kill herself; but if *we* were flung into the same position, we should crawl out by

some easier way. We realize that Othello is doomed to kill his wife, but we understand also that the tragical oblation is absurd: if *we* were in the same position, we should perceive that Desdemona had been maligned by the perversity of evidence. We should not behave like Hedda or Othello, because we are not at all like either of them. Each of them is clearly characterized and convinces us of an essential disparity with ourselves. But in melodrama the heroine and hero are not clearly characterized; they are represented not as particular people, but merely as *anybody* involved in the situation of the moment; and we naturally take the stage, adopt their destiny as our own, and experience in our particular imagination all that is happening to them. Thus, in Mr. Gillette's admirable melodrama entitled *Held by the Enemy*, when the captured Confederate lieutenant confesses to the Union court-martial that he is a spy, and glories in his sinister vocation, inviting with a smile the death that will complete his sense of duty done, it is not so much to him that the incident occurs as to you or me, seated in the audience; for at that moment, in imagination, we take the stage and speak the words of martyrdom ourselves. For it is the special grace of melodrama to represent not what a particular person will do in a given situation, but what *anybody* would do under such a stress of

circumstance; and since anybody is easily identifiable with ourself, we imagine the situation as happening to us and adopt it into our particular experience.

This is, of course, the philosophic point which explains the popularity of that special species of melodrama which, in New York, flourishes on Third Avenue and Eighth Avenue. The devotees of cheap melodrama are workaday people to whom, in the orderly procession of the days, nothing noteworthy ever happens; and in the theatre they demand the sort of play in which surprising and startling adventures will happen not only to the people on the stage but to themselves. Therefore the characters on the stage must not be so sharply drawn as to be set apart from any person in the audience; and adventure must be represented for its own sake, regardless of the personality of the people it involves. As Sir Thomas Browne loved to lose himself in a mystery, so the auditors of our ten, twenty, and thirty-cent theatres love to lose themselves in an irresponsible train of circumstances which conceivably might happen to themselves. In a word, they go to the theatre to enjoy *themselves* — which is to say their own imagined hesitancies and imperilments — and decidedly not to enjoy some totally different and extraneous creature like Hedda Gabler or Othello. The popularity, as a

character, of Bertha (the sewing-machine girl) or Nellie (the beautiful cloak-model) is explicable by the fact that neither of them is, in any precise sense, a character at all; and that therefore any woman in the audience can, without the slightest straining of imagination, set herself in the heroine's place and experience vicariously the adventures that befall her.

Let us recapitulate a moment, for the sake of clearness. We have already observed that melodrama epitomizes the major portion of habitual experience, because it emphasizes incident above character as a factor in human destiny; and also, since it leaves the hero and the heroine uncharacterized, that it permits, more easily than tragedy, that the spectator should in imagination take the stage and assume as his own the adventures of the plot. But there is another very important point which must be accounted for in any final definition of the art of melodrama.

This point — perhaps the most important that we have to consider — is that the abiding mood of melodrama is an absolute and dauntless optimism. The world of melodrama is a just and lucky world where all things fall out fitly. We are granted from the outset an assurance that in the end the guilty will be punished and the virtuous attain their due reward. No innocent Ophelia or Cordelia will be dragged down in the

maelström of catastrophe. Our cherished characters are flung repeatedly into imminent danger of death, and we feel their pangs and perils as our own; but we know all along — and bless ourselves with knowing — that no one will be killed except the villain. This is the great charm of melodrama — that it deals with charmed lives. Sherlock Holmes will surely escape from the gas-chamber — though *how*, indeed, we cannot possibly foresee. In watching melodrama of a cruder sort, we experience this same sense of a comfortable providence. You may lock the heroine in a lion's cage, throw her off of Brooklyn Bridge, tie her to the subway tracks, and dangle her by a rope from the windy summit of the Singer tower; but we know all along that the kindly gods who look after the destiny of heroines will rescue her from harm and consign her as good as new to the strong arms of the hero. And there is another matter which, in the interests of criticism, it is surely not indelicate to mention; and that is that we derive a world of solid comfort from our certainty that the virtue of the heroine is inviolable. At every moment she is chaperoned by destiny. What Milton expressed supremely in his portrayal of the Lady in *Comus*, our melodramatists repeat with cruder emphasis; namely, that virginity is its own defense and virtue shields itself with spiritual armor. In *The Deep Purple*, which is one

of the best of recent melodramas, the silly girl of a heroine who has run away from home with a deep-dyed villain with whom she thinks herself in love, is providentially preserved in purity till she may meet and marry the most lovable of heroes. Here is a vision of the world as we would have it. If ever we were erected to the exalted state of Zeus-upon-Olympus, it is thus that we should stage-direct the tremendous drama of humanity. It is true, indeed, that life as it exists is not so ordered:—one of our best architects and most serviceable citizens is absurdly slain in a taxi-cab collision; Kentucky sends to Congress a man who was once convicted of complicity in an ignominious murder; corruption buys a seat in the Senate; a valuable novelist is shot down by a madman:—we look about us and it seems that there is neither right nor reason in the inappealable decrees of destiny. But meanwhile the noble art of melodrama stands up scornful before many spears and confronts the iniquity of fate with a laugh “broad as a thousand beeves at pasture.”

No art has ever succeeded because of its defects; and the fact that melodrama has been and is perennially popular can be explained only by what is great and noble in it. Melodrama answers one of the most profound of human needs:—it ministers to that motive which philosophers term

the will to believe. It looks at life — as Paul enjoined humanity to look at it — with faith and hope. So, when the toilers in our sweat-shops attend the ten, twenty, and thirty-cent theatres, they escape into a region where faith is not an idle jest and hope is not an irony; and thereafter, when they reassume the heavy and the weary weight of all their unintelligible world, they may yet smile backward in remembrance of that momentary dream-world in which destiny was just and kind and good. A happy face in the street is a gift to the community; and this art that always wears a happy face is a gift to humanity at large.

III

We may now redefine melodrama as a serious play in which the incidents determine and control the characters and in which the auditors are assured from the outset that all will come out as they wish it in the end. Thus defined, melodrama must be admitted to include many of the most important plays in the history of the drama. It must not be supposed that the art began with Victorien Sardou; it is at least as old as Euripides, and was highly honored in the Spain of Calderon and Lope and the England of the spacious times of great Elizabeth. Many of the stirring plays which used to pass for tragedies

Definet

in our histories of the drama are now seen to be merely melodramas. Tragedy must exhibit an inevitable doom; and the inevitable is nearly as rare in art as it is in life. Life itself is seldom tragic, in any exact and technical sense; and there are very few unquestionable tragedies in the history of art. Victor Hugo, who admitted that his three prose plays were melodramas, thought that his plays in verse were tragedies; but we now perceive that *Hernani* and *Ruy Blas* and all the rest of them are melodramas also — and we like them none the less because of the change of label. Those windy suspirations of forced breath which in mid-Victorian days were esteemed as tragedies, and are still looked upon with loving reminiscence by the backward-minded Mr. William Winter, were all melodramas, and melodramas of a rather crude and secondary sort. The *Virginius* of Sheridan Knowles, the *Richelieu* of Bulwer-Lytton, the *Fool's Revenge* of Tom Taylor (an adaptation from Hugo), were melodramas pure and simple, though they wore the literary trappings and the suits of tragedy. It is always disconcerting to find one art masquerading in the dress of another; a melodrama that pretends to be a tragedy afflicts us ultimately with an overwhelming sense that it is ashamed of itself; and the sense of shame is incompatible with the sense of easy enjoyment. Retrospective criticism must

therefore finally prefer such frank and gloating melodramas as the *Tour de Nesle* of the elder Dumas, the *Fédora* of Sardou, the *Two Orphans* of Dennery, or those favorites of our fathers, *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* and *Jim the Penman*. *Jim the Penman* thrilled the younger generation when it was revived a few years ago; and *The Two Orphans*, which is always with us, is — if not a thing of beauty — at least a joy forever.

Since melodrama casts its emphasis on action, rather than on character, it calls, far more than tragedy, for an exhibition of the uttermost mechanical equipment of the stage. We turn to the tragedies and comedies of other ages to see the highest development of the drama in those times; but if we wish to acquaint ourselves with the highest development of theatric presentation in any age, we must turn our attention to its melodramas. When Mr. Belasco produces a quiet comedy like *The Concert*, he exhibits less emphatically his skill in stage-direction than when he produces a melodrama like *The Girl of the Golden West*. *The Great Ruby* gave more noticeable evidence of the ability of Augustin Daly as a producer than did *The School for Scandal* or *The Merchant of Venice*. The mechanism of melodrama has been carried to the highest efficiency in London, on the stage of Drury Lane. In *The Whip*, which ran a year at Old Drury, a

railroad train was wrecked upon the stage (in pursuance of the villain's plot to kill the hero's race-horse, which was being transported in a box-car); and the sight of the derailed and overturning engine panting and puffing bravely after the intolerable crash thrilled through the thousand-fold assembled audience and evoked a tremor even from the sophisticated critic. In *The Sins of Society*, another Drury Lane melodrama, a battleship went down, with all hands rallied round the flag. It may be finer dramatic art for Mrs. Fiske to sit still and think hard in *Rosmersholm*; but it is more wonderful theatric art to sink a ship upon the stage; and on purely human grounds there are many reasons for regarding a sinking ship as a more pathetic spectacle than a falling woman.

And this suggests a final word that must be said in favor of melodrama:—it gives the actors an opportunity to act. In every scene they have to *do* things; they cannot—like Mrs. Patrick Campbell—turn away from the audience and think with their backs. Thinking with the back may be the most mystical and esoteric performance that is possible to humankind: at least we have, in support of this belief, the high authority of M. Auguste Rodin—the sole surviving Titan of these desultory days—who once told a visitor of his that the secret of his *Penseur* is that he

thinks with his back. But on the stage it is surely more thrilling to watch the blind Louise grope her way down the banister of a declining stairway, and then pass inadvertently within six inches of the prostrate form of the fainting Henriette, whom she has sought so long and with so many heartaches, and is not destined to discover until the whirligig of the melodrama brings in its final revenges. Even so — as a matter of mere acting — we would rather watch the negro servant, in the last act of *Secret Service*, remove the bullets from the stacked guns of the Union guards, than watch the facial play of Hedda Gabler as she sits in silence debating her problem of impending suicide. For in this the theatre differs from life: — that, on the stage, action speaks louder than character, and to *do* is more important than to *be*.

Latterly there has appeared in our theatres a new type of the sort of melodrama that is ashamed of itself — which, while not pretending to be tragedy, pretends to be a serious study of contemporary social problems. A definitive example of this type is the *Judith Zaraine* of Mr. C. M. S. McClellan, which masqueraded as a social study and very promptly failed. In this play, Mr. McClellan spoiled a good melodramatic story by submerging it beneath oceans of tall talk about capital and labor. Nowadays it is considered an

evidence of earnestness to talk about capital and labor, just as in the middle ages it was considered an evidence of earnestness to talk about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin; fashions change in tall talk, while the singing world rolls on; but when a man finds a melodrama made to his hand, why, in the name of art, should he ruin it by trying to turn it into something else? The merit of *The Deep Purple*, on the other hand, inheres in the frankness with which the authors avow and flourish the fact that they are writing melodrama. The new melodrama will never rival the glory of the old until it sloughs off all sophistication and disguise, and comes forward frankly as a play of plot supervised by a kindly and ingratiating providence. Mascarille becomes ignoble only when he masquerades as a nobleman; and a lesser art retains its dignity only so long as it refrains from emulation of a greater. *Judith Zaraine* is dead, and so is *The Fool Hath Said* — which tried to be a tragedy. Meanwhile, Mr. Gillette is still winning golden encomiums with *Secret Service*; and those who remember are still eager for another slashing voyage through the tossed and foaming seas of Dennery.

XXI

THE ART OF THE MOVING-PICTURE PLAY

THE inventions of science serve frequently to broaden the domains of art by offering the artist new media of expression. The development of skeleton steel construction has given our architects an opportunity to imagine that new type of beauty in the art of building which has obtained consummate embodiment in the Metropolitan Tower. Photography, which began merely as a mechanical process, has developed into an art more subtle for handling elusive effects of light and shadow than even the major art of painting. The introduction of electrical illumination has revolutionized the art of stage-direction in our theatres. As new avenues of opportunity are opened to the artist by the march of science, the processes of the traditional arts are required to readjust themselves to meet the new conditions. The scientific invention of the cinematograph suggested the artistic invention of the moving-picture play — a novel type of narrative, wherein a fictitious story is represented in pantomime by

actors and reproduced by the kinetoscope; and the new art sprang at once into competition with certain of the previously established types of drama.

The domain of criticism is co-extensive with the domain of art, and should naturally be broadened to include those new provinces which the inventions of science and the consequent inventions of art have recently discovered and annexed. It will not do for the critic to ignore a new art because it is new or because its basis is mechanical. All art arises from the application of a mechanism; and the hoariest of the traditional arts was new at some time in the history of mankind. The critic of architecture must accept the skyscraper; the critic of painting must consider the new art of photography; and it is surely not logical that the moving-picture play should be ignored by our critics of the novel and the drama. A new type of narrative that has achieved such immediate and such widespread popularity as the moving-picture play must certainly be worthy of serious criticism. If we should learn nothing else from a study of its materials and methods, we should at least succeed in clarifying our ideas concerning those pre-existent types of narrative from which it has derived its processes.

Even a casual study of the moving-picture play will convince us of the soundness of that

principle of contemporary criticism that nearly every good play has for its basis a good pantomime, and that dialogue — the purely literary element — while not the least important, is at any rate the least indispensable, of the many elements which are compounded in that complex work of art, the acted drama. The kinematograph be-
reaves the drama of the spoken word; and it must be surprising to the literary theorists to learn how much is left — how vividly the essential elements of action, character, and setting may convey themselves by visual means alone. Pantomime has been recognized for many centuries as a legitimate type of drama; but it is safe to say that the variety and the extent of its adaptability as a means of story-telling were never fully understood until the invention of the kinematograph demanded of it an unprecedented exercise. The familiar French one-act pantomime entitled *La Main* has been reproduced by the flittering film, and is fully as effective on the screen as on the stage. Such a classic of the art of pantomime as that wordless drama in three acts, *L'Enfant Prodigue*, devised by Michel Carré, which was recently revived at the Carnegie Lyceum by Mme. Pilar-Morin, could be reproduced by the kinetoscope without any loss of dramatic effect and would furnish an interesting evening's entertainment. But even the spoken drama might, in many

of its classic manifestations, be kinematographed without irremediable loss. Several of the melodramas of Sardou have already been successfully submitted to the process; and it is not impossible to imagine a wordless reproduction of even more eminent types of drama. Such a farce, for example, as *Le Médecin Malgré Lui* of Molière could easily tell itself through the medium of the moving picture and would still awaken laughter. Molière's humor always expresses itself through the situation or the character and never through the mere language of the dialogue; in all his plays there is not a single witty line; and humor which is thus mainly visual, instead of auditory, in its appeal may be conveyed in pantomime. The screen scene of *The School for Scandal* — to choose an instance from high comedy — would remain clearly intelligible in all its necessary implications if it were acted without words; and if we desire an example from poetic tragedy, we need only consider that the final scene of *Hamlet* would still be thrillingly appealing if it were projected on the silent but animated screen. The only type of drama which is absolutely unavailable for the kinetoscope is that in which the element of action is entirely subordinated to the element of character and in which incidents are imagined off the stage for the sake of their subsequent psychologic effect on the people present

to the eye — the type that is represented by the tragedies of Corneille and Racine and some of the social dramas of Ibsen and his imitators. But since the preponderant proportion of the existing drama conveys its message more by visual than by auditory means, it seems strange that more of our standard plays have not been reproduced in moving pictures. For some time we have utilized the phonograph to record the voices of our greatest opera singers. Why should we not also utilize the kinematograph to record the visual aspects of the acting of our greatest histrionic artists? This available invention should surely be applied to make a permanent record of such bits of acting, for example, as Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's death scene in *Hamlet*. That moment when his half-uplifted hands wave and flutter in the air, and his face is for the last time suffused with the ineffable smile that dawned over it in the first act at the phrase, "Methinks I see my father," and then the head sinks forward in sign that for all eternity the rest is silence — surely this, and many moments like it, should be recorded, like Caruso's voice, before the living artist is stolen from the world.

But, on the other hand, there is a sound critical reason why the moving-picture play should not confine itself to the reproduction of the ordinary spoken drama. In several important respects the

moving picture is a more serviceable medium for story-telling than the regular drama; and it can achieve its most interesting effects by flinging emphasis upon such expedients of narrative as lie beyond the reach of the actual theatre. The main advantage of the moving-picture play over the traditional types of drama is that the author is granted an immeasurably greater freedom in handling the categories of place and time. The modern play must confine itself to not more than three or four definite localizations; but a story told by moving pictures may change its place as frequently as the author may desire. He may arrange his tale in fifty scenes instead of four; and this is, technically, an immeasurable advantage. Instead of constraining his characters to meet at a certain place at a certain moment, he may visit them at different moments in the various places where they choose to be. In this freedom the moving-picture play resembles those earlier types of drama which flourished before the stage restricted its range of narrative by adopting a definite scenic setting. Students of the history of the theatre will discern a close analogy between the moving-picture play and that type of chronicle history which was developed in the early Elizabethan period and was utilized repeatedly by Shakespeare. The battle episodes of Shakespeare's histories, vivid with alarums and excur-

sions, wherein the scene shifts momentarily from one part of the field of conflict to another, and the characters make a rapid transit before the eye, launching hasty, incoherent lines in passing, could be suggested more emphatically by the kinematograph than on the modern scenery-en-cumbered stage.

Furthermore, the moving picture possesses a notable advantage over the contemporary regular drama in its ability to alter, in the fraction of a second, the point of view from which the story shall be looked upon. As soon as a character has passed through a certain door, the scene may be shifted from the room that he has left to the room that he has entered; and the eye may follow him all through a house from cellar to attic without any loss of time. The new art of the moving-picture play is the only one of all the many arts of narrative which makes it possible for the observer to follow with the actual eye the passage of a character through a mile or more of space. In this new form of artistic presentation, a person may walk, run, ride, drive, sail, swim, or fly for any distance, and yet be accompanied through his entire transit by the actual eye of the observer. This fact offers to the artist who devises a scenario for the kinematograph many possibilities of narrative which lie far beyond the

range of the writer for the restricted stage of the ordinary drama.

In this freedom in handling place and time and in shifting the point of view, the moving-picture play resembles the novel much more nearly than it resembles the regular drama. The solitary horseman, dear to Scott and Cooper, could not be shown upon the stage; but he might easily be represented on the screen. If we draw on our imagination, we may readily adduce a more emphatic illustration of this point. *Treasure Island*, for example, could not possibly be dramatized for presentation in the regular theatre, because the interest of the action is dependent on its rapid change of place from hour to hour; but the entire story, from the outset to the end, could be told in moving pictures; and many of the scenes, since their appeal to the imagination is mainly visual, would be even more effective on the screen than on the printed page.

In handling the element of action, the moving-picture play is more successful than the novel, since its appeal is made directly to the eye instead of to the imagination, and it is scarcely less successful than the drama. In handling the element of setting, it is overwhelmingly superior, not only to the novel but to the drama as well. In dealing with interiors, the moving-picture play remains on a par with the regular drama; but in

dealing with scenes set out of doors, it passes far beyond the reach of the roofed and stationary stage. In the modern theatre the Forest of Arden is nothing but a huddled conglomeration of canvas trees; but in the moving-picture play, scenes like those between Shakespeare's idyllic lovers may be performed in an actual forest, drifting from place to place among trees that sift the sunlight and flutter their leafy branches in the breeze. The kinematograph is especially successful in rendering effects of moving air and water. On the stage, the sea can be suggested only by a crude and bungling mechanism; but in the moving-picture play a scene may pass upon an actual sandy beach, with league-long round-backed breakers creaming on the shore. Boats always look silly on the stage; but the kinematograph may fluently represent the paddling of a canoe past bend after bend of a rippling river. Animals, also, which can never be trusted to behave naturally in the theatre, may be used as important agents in the plot when the scene is conducted actually out of doors. To the mind of most contemporary artists the element of setting is not the least significant of the three necessary elements of narrative; and it is therefore an exceedingly important point that criticism is forced to concede that the local environment of a story may be exhibited more directly and more vividly

in the moving-picture play than in any of the older types of narrative. It is only in handling the element of character that the new art is at a disadvantage in competing with the novel and the drama. The many expedients that the dramatist and the novelist may use for delineating character are reduced, in the moving-picture play, to one. What people are may be suggested only by what they do: by their deeds, and only by their deeds, we know them. In drawing character, the moving-picture play suffers a strict confinement of range in consequence of its inability to use the spoken word. Only a small minority of those innumerable characteristics which are compounded into any individual human temperament express themselves naturally in action which is obvious to the eye. Here then — in handling the element of character — lies the weakness of the moving-picture play considered technically as a type of narrative — just as, in handling that other element of setting, lies its strength.

This analysis makes it possible for us to define the type of story which may be most competently represented by the kinematograph. Obviously the most desirable narrative material for a moving-picture play is material in which the elements of action and setting are paramount and the element of character subsidiary — in other words, a story in which incident treads

upon the heels of incident and the action rushes headlong through a hurried succession of objective events, set preferably out of doors. It will be noticed at once that, whereas this definition utterly fails to fit the modern regular drama, it almost exactly fits the traditional romantic novel of adventure. If we revert to an illustration that has already been adduced, we shall observe that this definition of what is necessary in a moving-picture play points directly to that traditional type of narrative that Stevenson revived in *Treasure Island*.

In fact, a re-reading of Stevenson's *Gossip on Romance* will give us a very vivid sense of the sources of the interest and charm of which the moving-picture play is particularly capable. What Stevenson says in praise of the romantic novel of adventure may be applied with equal justice to that new art which did not spring into existence till after he was dead. "The story," he says, "should repeat itself in a thousand colored pictures to the eye. It was for this last pleasure that we read so closely, and loved our books so dearly, in the bright, troubled period of boyhood. Eloquence and thought, character and conversation, were but obstacles to brush aside as we dug blithely after a certain sort of incident, like a pig for truffles. For my part, I liked a story to begin with an old wayside inn,

where, 'toward the close of the year 17—,' several gentlemen in three-cocked hats were playing bowls. A friend of mine preferred the Malabar coast in a storm, with a ship beating to windward, and a scowling fellow of Herculean proportions striding along the beach; he, to be sure, was a pirate. . . . One and all, at least, and each with his particular fancy, we read story-books in childhood, not for eloquence or character or thought, but for some quality of the brute incident. . . . Conduct is three parts of life, they say; but I think they put it high. There is a vast deal in life . . . where the interest turns . . . not on the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience, but on the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence, in clean open-air adventure, the shock of arms or the diplomacy of life. With such material as this it is impossible to build a play, for the serious theatre exists solely on moral grounds, and is a standing proof of the dissemination of the human conscience. But it is possible to build, upon this ground, . . . the most lively, beautiful, and buoyant tales."

Here, in the words of a great artist in narrative, we have a clear and comprehensive statement of the possibilities that lie open to the maker of the moving-picture play. He cannot contend with the dramatist in working out those problems of conscience which confront the will; he cannot

compete with the novelist in analyzing characters; but he may tell, with a vividness beyond the reach of their less visual expedients of appeal, "the most lively, beautiful, and buoyant tales," in which the interest is centered not in "eloquence or character or thought" but in "some quality of the brute incident."

It is evident, therefore, that the art of the moving-picture play is not an art to be despised or ignored by serious criticism. It represents, in fact — to look upon it from the historical point of view — a reversion to an earlier and more perennially refreshing mood of narrative than that which latterly has assumed dominion over the novel and the drama. The moving-picture play carries us back to the boyish age of the great art of telling tales, when stories were narrated nakedly as stories instead of being sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. One can hardly imagine Mr. Henry James devising a successful scenario for the kinematograph; but the Shakespeare who wrote *Richard III* and the Homer who wrote the *Odyssey* would experience no difficulty in fulfilling the requirements. It is only very recently that the masters of the art of fiction have made war upon the optic nerve and exalted the subjective over the objective. Our modern interest in those intimate phases of character which refuse to reveal themselves in action is, certainly, sophisti-

cated and excessive. It is therefore with a feeling somewhat of relief that we notice that the newest of all the arts of narrative — the moving-picture play — disembarrases its stories of *psychologizing*, and tells them in the free and boyish spirit that vivified the epic, the drama, and the novel throughout the centuries before the world grew old.

It is not at all surprising that the moving-picture play has driven out of existence the cheap type of popular melodrama. The reason is not merely that the moving-picture show could undersell the regular theatre and offer a performance for five cents instead of for ten, twenty, and thirty. In the whole history of the world, no art, however cheap, has ever annihilated a more expensive art which was basically better than itself. The real reason for the triumph of the moving-picture play is the purely critical reason that it offered a more artistic type of narrative than the old popular melodrama. In cheap melodrama, all that was worth while was the vividness and the variety of the incidents; the characters did not count, except as puppets in the plot; and the dialogue, crude and frequently absurd, was more a bother than a help. In abolishing dialogue the moving-picture show relieved the cheap drama of its weakest element; it could suggest character with less obvious falsification than the actual pop-

ular drama; and it could easily excel it in the projection of incidents, both on the score of variety and on the score of vividness.

The thing that is surprising is that, except in France, the moving-picture play has not more fully availed itself of those artistic opportunities which are open to it, and thereby raised itself to competition with more refined and more expensive types of drama than were set forth in the old ten, twenty, and thirty-cent theatres. Many of the moving-picture plays which may now be seen are good; but only a little imagination is needed to see that they might easily be made better. Certain reports in the newspapers have indicated recently that the popular interest in moving pictures throughout the country is declining. If this be true, the new art must bestir itself to fulfil more completely than heretofore the high artistic aims of which it is indubitably capable. It is too good an art for the public to lose; and it can retain its popularity if it labors to deserve it.

XXII

THE ONE-ACT PLAY IN AMERICA

I

THE development of the drama is conditioned, more than that of any other art, by the economic principle of supply and demand. No considerable number of playwrights will devote their energies, in any period, to writing a type of play that is seldom or never called for in the theatre of that period. At the present time, for instance, it would be a waste of labor for an author to construct a play in two parts, of five acts each, to be played upon successive evenings, because, according to our present social custom, it would be impossible to persuade any audience to attend the same play two nights running; yet this form was frequently employed in the Elizabethan period (as in the case of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*) and again in the Restoration period (as in the case of Dryden's *Conquest of Granada*), and even so recently as 1873 it was used by Henrik Ibsen for his "world-historic drama" entitled *Emperor and Galilean*. What these playwrights were allowed to do, in other ages, by the custom

of the theatre, our own authors are forbidden to attempt to-day.

But the main point to be observed is that the custom of the theatre is a variable thing, and that just as certain forms may be allowed to lapse from usage in any period, so also is it possible to call other forms into active exercise by the incentive of a general demand. The structure of the drama is determined mainly by the social habits of the theatre-going public. Such apparently minor matters as an alteration of the dinner-hour, for example, may necessitate a revolution in the dramaturgic methods of a nation. In its original form, *Hamlet* was written to be played at three P. M. and to continue until evening; but the piece is now too long to be exhibited in its entirety before an audience that dines late and prefers to go to the theatre after dinner. If Shakespeare were writing this tragedy to-day, he would feel impelled to tell his story in two hours, and he would probably feel forced to alter the superb opening of the drama in order to discount the inevitable interruption imposed upon contemporary playwrights by the discourtesy of tardy diners.

Thus far, the theatre-system in America has discouraged the composition of the one-act play, and the managers who regulate our theatres have steadfastly refused to be persuaded that this in-

teresting type of drama would be welcomed by any considerable proportion of the theatre-going public. But the managers are by no means always right in their estimates of what the public does not want, — a fact that is indicated not infrequently when some adventurer among them achieves an emphatic success by a daring departure from established customs. The one-act play is so worthy in itself, as a medium of artistic expression, and the cultivation of this form would be so helpful to the cause of our dramatic art in general, that it is desirable that we should examine carefully the present attitude of the public and the managers, with a view of asking whether it would not be possible, without running counter to the present social customs of our public, to encourage the development of this special type of drama.

There are, generally speaking, only three ways in which the one-act play can be afforded a professional production. First, it may be exhibited in vaudeville, as part of a continuous performance whose other features — like acrobats, trained dogs, and song and dance “artists” who can neither sing nor dance — reveal no relation whatsoever to the art of the drama. Second, it may be presented in a legitimate theatre as an adjunct to a longer play, — either as a curtain-raiser or as an after-piece. Or third, it is possible to make

THE ONE-ACT PLAY IN AMERICA 243

up a special evening's bill by presenting three or four one-act plays together. Let us examine in turn the conditions which surround each of these opportunities in America to-day.

The demand for one-act plays in our thousands of vaudeville theatres is nothing short of enormous; and yet this demand, as at present regulated, is not of a sort to encourage sincere artists to write for these theatres. The reason is that, whether rightly or wrongly, our vaudeville managers seem to have made up their minds that their audiences have no brains. They have apparently decided that only two types of dramatic sketches can successfully be presented to fifty-cent audiences, — first, comic skits whose humor is purposefully crude and is achieved mainly by means of horseplay, and, second, mechanical melodramas whose action is so full of sound and fury that they bear no reference to life. It would be difficult to persuade an earnest dramatist to waste his energy in writing either of these types; and, judging from most of the sketches that are presented in these theatres, the managers do not even attempt to enlist the services of authors who can think and write.

No experience could be more depressing to any intelligent person than to spend six successive evenings in six different vaudeville theatres in New York. The experiment, if attempted, would

probably result in suicide on Sunday. But as our hypothetical person of intelligence was kissing his assembled family a last farewell, he would wistfully be moved to wonder whether the vaudeville public really is so empty-headed as the vaudeville managers presume. Undoubtedly they reason that, since the public fills their theatres, they must be giving the public what it wants. But does it follow, necessarily, that the same public would not also fill their theatres if they gave it something better? There are millions of people in this country who can afford only fifty cents for entertainment, but who, feeling that entertainment is an imperative necessity, must spend their fifty cents for whatever the vaudeville managers are willing to set before them. They suffer from a tragic need of laughter; and the fact that they laugh easily at a clown whose clothes are too big for him does not at all indicate that they would not also laugh eagerly at the whimsicalities of Sir James Barrie. In many of our minor cities the best theatre is a vaudeville theatre; it is patronized by the best people; and we must therefore accept as a logical inference the supposition that the audience is more intelligent than the show. But this inevitable supposition amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum*; for surely the only real satisfaction that can be derived by an intelligent person in the theatre is the pleasure of

encountering an intelligence more able than his own. The few good one-act plays that have been produced, in recent years, in vaudeville—like *Madam Butterfly* or Barrie's *The Twelve Pound Look*—have been accepted with enthusiasm by the public of the cheaper theatres; and it would seem obvious to a logical mind that it would pay the vaudeville managers to supply their public with other plays of this high order of artistic merit. But the hardest thing to teach any theatrical manager is the advisability—from the standpoint of mere business—of looking up to the public instead of down upon it; and, solely because of this fact, our vaudeville theatres at the present moment, in spite of their enormous need, offer small encouragement to the composition of worthy one-act plays by earnest artists.

Let us turn our attention, therefore, to the second possibility,—the possibility of presenting one-act plays in conjunction with longer pieces. This possibility is habitually realized in London,—but with unsatisfactory results. In London, the normal dinner-hour of the aristocracy is eight o'clock; and it is therefore impossible to raise the curtain on the chief play of the evening until nine. But since the pit and gallery are unreserved, these sections of the house are filled before eight o'clock by people who have often stood in line for hours. Since it is necessary to entertain these

humbler patrons until the hour when the aristocrats are ready to stroll into the stalls, it is a custom in the London theatres to put on a one-act play as a prelude to the main piece of the evening. But, in their choice of these curtain-raisers, the London managers seem influenced by a depressive sense that only the less important part of the audience will see them; for seldom are these one-act plays more meritorious than those which are presented in our cheaper theatres in America. On the occasion of my last professional visit to London, I must have seen over thirty curtain-raisers; but none of them was sufficiently impressive to linger in my memory. Here again we have an instance of an opportunity that has been thrown away because the managers have chosen to look down upon their poorer patrons.

The custom of using curtain-raisers is not common in New York, for the reason that the dinner-hour is set sixty minutes earlier than in London, and that the entire audience is willing that the curtain should be rung up at twenty minutes after eight — provided, of course, that everybody be allowed the boorish privilege of coming late. In practice, a successful British play which, in London, was begun at nine o'clock, is begun in New York at twenty minutes after eight and is padded out with unnecessary intervals between the acts. By this process, the American

manager makes the piece apparently fill the evening and spares himself the expense of preceding it with a curtain-raiser.

An habitual attendant at the New York theatres cannot avoid wondering at the meekness with which the public tolerates this padding. A play that has been announced for eight-twenty will actually be begun at eight-forty; and, after every act, fifteen, or often twenty, minutes will be wasted in an *entr'acte*. The manager is satisfied if he can contrive to defer the final curtain-fall until a few minutes before eleven; and he will subsequently state that there is no demand for one-act plays, because the public is unwilling to come to the theatre before eight-twenty and insists on being let out at eleven. He will tell you about the large proportion of the theatre-going public that has to catch suburban trains; but he will not listen while you count up the time that has deliberately been thrown away between the acts. Here again it must be evident that an opportunity is being wasted, and that the attitude of the managers cannot honestly be accepted as an indication of any real lack of interest, on the part of the public, in the production of one-act plays.

But let us turn now to the consideration of the third possibility, which is the most promising of all. In many of the best theatres of Europe it is customary to present an evening's bill that is

made up of three or four one-act plays; and there seems to be no logical reason why a similar experiment should not be successful in America. Recently, Mr. Charles Frohman attempted, in London, to make an evening's entertainment out of three one-act plays, by three of the most eminent of English dramatic authors, — Sir Arthur Pinero, Sir James Barrie, and Mr. Bernard Shaw; and the venture failed merely because the Barrie play was the only one of the trio which evoked the approval of the public. The example of the Grand Guignol in Paris has been, perhaps, too often cited. The policy of this little theatre is based upon the proposition that a shock, to the nerves or to the conscience, which would be unendurable if protracted through three acts, may safely be effected in the sudden, brief compass of a single act. Most of the plays exploited at the Grand Guignol have, therefore, been sensational. The authors of these little dramas have combined to exhibit lurid glimpses of life in a Chamber of Horrors; but our loitering and huge and kindly life can really be considered no more as a chamber of horrors than as a vale of tears. The Grand Guignol has shut out from its range of vision the most enjoyable detail of human life, — for it has shut out joy.

In Germany, the one-act play is considered more seriously than in France. A typical in-

stance is the evening's entertainment devised by Hermann Sudermann with the title *Morituri*. This bill consists of three distinct one-act plays which are related to each other only by the circumstance that, in each of them, the leading character is condemned to inevitable death within twenty-four hours and is so situated that he cannot possibly confide his doom to any of the other characters. Such an entertainment as this is eagerly received by the public of the German nations.

In the English-speaking countries, the only company which has committed itself to the policy of regularly presenting three short plays in a single evening is the company of Irish Players of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. It is a significant fact that this company has repeated its success at home in its several appearances at the Court Theatre in London, and also in the theatres of Boston, Chicago, and New York. Instead of offering a repertory of two or three four-act plays, this company presents a repertory of no less than thirty-four brief compositions, in any of which its members are prepared to appear at an hour's notice. It is not difficult to estimate the opportunity that is afforded, by this policy, to the rising dramatists of Ireland. When I expressed surprise to Lady Gregory, the benign and motherly patron of the Irish Players, that one of their

most able authors, Mr. St. John G. Ervine, was only twenty-six or seven years of age, she answered with a smile, "That isn't young for us." By this repertory system the young author is encouraged to try his hand at one-act plays and is enabled to achieve a reputation in his 'prentice years.

Lady Gregory herself — perhaps in consequence of the demand effected by the policy of this very company — is one of the most accomplished artists in the one-act form now writing in the English language. Her brief dramatic anecdotes rarely attain the tensity that is expected in a full-length play; but they are deeply human in sagacity and broadly generous in humor. They remind us a little of the one-act plays of Molière; and their unassailed success upon the American stage leads us to question if our managers have not been near-sighted in shying away from the production of such amiable compositions in the past.

The only point that may be advanced against a compound theatre-bill of this sort is the point that is commonly brought forth by publishers to explain their hesitance in bringing out a volume of short-stories. It may be urged that it is difficult for an audience, in the brief space of two hours and a half, to shift its sympathy several times from one set of characters to another. This

seems, indeed, to constitute a real objection to the compound bill. Especially when the successive plays are to be performed by the same company of actors, it is difficult for the auditors to forget the first piece in time to deliver themselves completely to the second. Yet this theoretical objection has not made itself apparent in the practice of the Irish Players; and where so much may be gained by the adoption of the European policy of the compound bill, it would seem captious to insist upon what, after all, must merely be a minor point.

II

It would seem, from the foregoing considerations, that the present prejudice in America against encouraging the composition of the one-act play is lacking in logical foundation. But we must now consider the more important question whether the one-act play, if properly encouraged, would prove itself worth while. To this question the only answer must be emphatically in the affirmative.

From the merely practical standpoint, the development of the one-act play is desirable, for two very different reasons. In the first place, a broad market for the one-act play would afford our rising authors a needed opportunity for the exercise of their preliminary efforts toward the

broader craft of dramaturgy. At present, our magazine system affords our future novelists an opportunity to test their talents in the cognate art of the short-story. The short-story, to be sure, is distinct from the novel not only in magnitude but also in method; but a training in the one type is the best of all exercises to fit a young author to adventure on the other. To prove this point, one need only cite the instances of Hawthorne and Daudet. But at present our incipient dramatists are afforded no opportunity to exercise their wings in swallow-flights; and this fact militates strongly against the general effectiveness of our dramatic art.

As much time is required to write a single four-act play as to write half a dozen one-act plays. In the case of a new author, his ambitious four-act play will probably be bad; but if he could spend the same time in working out six little dramas in a single act, it is probable that one of them at least might be worthy of production. Those who have at last succeeded in a difficult art are likely to forget the terrible necessity of encouragement to those who still are striving; but one success in six brief efforts must mean more to an aspirant than the failure of a single more ambitious effort. Hence, in order to encourage the authors of a younger generation, it is tremendously desirable that we should put in com-

mon practice the policy of producing one-act plays.

But, of course, it may be questioned whether or not it is the business of the manager to encourage the efforts of the rising generation. Looking at the matter merely from the financial standpoint, this question must be decided emphatically in the affirmative. It is true, at any time, in any art, that "the old order changeth, yielding place to new"; and, in the theatre, that manager is most sure of making money who can hitch his wagon to the rising star of an author of real promise. It would, therefore, be profitable for our managers to establish a training-school for the talents of potential dramatists; and the most efficient training-school would be a theatre devoted to the production of one-act plays.

In the second place, a more general composition of one-act plays would offer our amateur actors a more easy opportunity to exercise their talents. The production of the average drama of ordinary length requires an expenditure beyond the means of amateurs; but the majority of one-act plays may be produced at very small expense. Of course, the question may be asked why the guardians of our dramatic destiny should trouble their minds at all to consider the demands of amateurs; but the answer is very simple. From the professional standpoint, the advantage of amateur act-

ing is that it fits the amateur performers for a more comprehensive enjoyment of the achievements of the professional theatre. The surest way to teach a boy or girl to appreciate the artistry of the sonnets of Rossetti is to encourage the student to write sonnets of his own. His efforts will probably be bad; but the mere exercise of his otherwise unrewarded attempts will prepare him the better to appreciate the achievement of the few great artists who have succeeded in the endeavor which has proved itself beyond his reach. To encourage amateur acting is to prepare an audience for the keen appreciation of the professional theatre; and any policy that meets the needs of amateurs should therefore be encouraged.

III

But apart from these immediate considerations, it must be maintained that the one-act play is admirable in itself, as a medium of art. It shows the same relation to the full-length play as the short-story shows to the novel. It makes a virtue of economy of means. It aims to produce a single dramatic effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis. The method of the one-act play at its best is similar to the method employed by Browning in his dramatic monologues. The author must

suggest the entire history of a soul by seizing it at some crisis of its career and forcing the spectator to look upon it from an unexpected and suggestive point of view. A one-act play, in exhibiting the present, should imply the past and intimate the future. The author has no leisure for laborious exposition; but his mere projection of a single situation should sum up in itself the accumulated results of many antecedent causes. The piece should be inconclusive, and yet pregnant with conclusions. The playwright should open a momentary little vista upon life, and then — with a sort of wistful smile — should ring the curtain down. The one-act play, at its best, can no more serve as a single act of a longer drama than the short-story can serve as a single chapter of a novel. The form is complete, concise, and self-sustaining; and it requires an extraordinary focus of imagination.

In view of the technical difficulties of this artistic form, it might be questioned whether we are equipped with the necessary talent to achieve a literature of one-act plays, even if our managers could be persuaded to offer due encouragement to the composition of this type of drama; but to this question, once again, the only answer must be in the affirmative. It is undeniable that any of our established dramatists could write a one-act play if the policy of our theatres should en-

courage him to do so; and it is scarcely less deniable that acceptable one-act plays might be written, under the stimulus of due encouragement, by any of the large army of authors who now contribute meritorious short-stories to our American magazines. There can be no question that we possess the talent; all that remains requisite is a theatrical policy that shall call our latent talent into active exercise.

XXIII

ORGANIZING AN AUDIENCE

I

ART thrives upon appreciation; and the most vital and human art has been produced in those periods when the love of art has been widespread throughout a great community. The general public of Periclean Athens loved architecture, sculpture, and the drama with a love like that for food and drink; and Phidias and Sophocles were hailed as heroes by adoring boys. If you had cast a casual stone in fourteenth-century Florence, you would have hit some lover of Madonnas. When Cimabue had completed his *Virgin Enthroned*, the entire town turned out for a holiday, and bore the picture — *their* picture — triumphantly along the Street of the Beautiful Ladies, to set it up in the south transept of Santa Maria Novella. And if in Elizabethan London you had mingled with the jostling throng that swarmed over London Bridge, you might have been sure that any one who trod upon your toes had applauded the acting of Burbage and hearkened to the hallowed line, "The rest is silence." So, in

the great age of Gothic architecture, the entire populace of Amiens, from the highest noble to the lowest peasant, toiled and saved and sacrificed, and poured their life's substance and their heart's desire into that supreme cathedral, which stands not as the monument of a single architect, nor even of a group of architects, but as a monument of civic aspiration and communistic joy.

Art is misconceived by those *dilettanti* who regard it merely as the personal expression of some select and lonely soul. Art, at its highest, is neither lonely nor select, but public and general in its appeal and its importance; and a great work of art, once fashioned, ceases to belong personally to the man who made it, but belongs instead to his nation and his age. The fact that great artists appear not singly but in groups, and always at such times and places when the general public recognizes their utterance as the expression of its own unuttered ecstasy of life, indicates that art should be regarded not as a function of the individual, but as a function of the populace. It follows that the best way to evoke great art is to educate the public to a great appreciation. Give the plant the proper soil, and it will thrive and flower. What the people really want they assuredly shall have; and when they want great art, great artists will emerge to give it to them. If we want great statues for our

city, our primary concern is not to educate a sculptor to fashion them, for the sculptor can educate himself; our concern is, rather, to educate our citizens to desire them. It is not so much our painters that we need to send to Rome and Paris; but if—in a spiritual sense—we could send our whole community to the capitals of art, we should surely have our painting. For history teaches us that great men arise, as if by miracle, to fulfil a great and public need: there has rarely been a revolution without its Washington, there has seldom been a civil war without its Lincoln. Gather a great community all eager for listening, and Art shall speak to it with a great voice. When all Italy wants a Michel Angelo, all Italy shall surely have him; and when all Elizabethan London loves the drama, some Shakespeare shall certainly arise.

But if all this applies to art in general, it applies with a particular emphasis to that most democratic of the arts—the drama. In a special and immediate sense, the drama is a function of the populace. The reality of an acted play is evoked by a collaboration between those whose minds are active behind the footlights and those whose minds are active in the auditorium; and the phenomenon will fail unless the minds of the artists and the minds of the auditors answer each to each with sympathy and appreciation. It is no

longer necessary, in these pages, to insist that the dramatist is dependent on his audience — that his themes, his thoughts, and his emotions, must fall within the mental range of the multitude that he is writing for. Without an appreciative audience a play cannot endure: empty your auditorium, and your work of art ceases to exist: and in the theatre the general and democratic public tells emphatically, by its patronage, what it is the public wants. The power to save or damn a play is vested neither in the author nor the actor nor the critic nor the manager; it is vested solely in the audience. It follows, with irrefutable logic, that to support a worthy drama you must have a worthy public, and that a noble dramatist can arise and do his work only when he is assured of the appreciation of a noble audience.

Here, then, we strike at the heart of the fallacy of most of those dreamers who endeavor to uplift the stage. They begin upon the wrong side of the footlights. They try to uplift the author or the actor or the manager; whereas, to attain any real result, they ought first to uplift the audience. They complain because the managers are commercial; but there is no solid ground for this complaint. Every art must be fostered by a business; the dramatic art must be exploited by the theatre business; and the manager must be a business man. A business man would be a fool

unless he regulated his business in accordance with the primary economic principle of supply and demand. Shakespeare and Molière, who were managers, as well as actors and dramatists, conducted their business upon this economic principle and were just as commercial as Mr. Shubert or Mr. Brady. Also, when a dramatist has written one sort of play that the public likes, it is futile to berate him and demand that he shall write another sort of play that his public does not like; and it is silly to ask an actress who plays a chorus-lady well to play Lady Macbeth badly, in the fancied interests of art. The only movement for uplifting the stage which can have any practical and good result must be a movement for uplifting the audience. The way to improve the author, the actor, and the manager leads through the box-office. Pay them better to produce and exploit the best dramatic art, and they will not fob you off with art that is inferior; they will not be able to afford to do so.

These considerations are immediate and practical; but, in a larger and more idealistic outlook, it is clear that we cannot expect great art in our theatre until our audience is ready for it. So long as the public remains contented with inferiority, our drama will remain inferior. So long as a masterpiece of dramaturgic craftsmanship like *The Thunderbolt* is allowed to pass un-

appreciated by our public, so long must managers prefer to set forth a tawdry monstrosity like *Everywoman*. So long as the public applauds Miss Adams's performance in *Chantecler* and refuses to appreciate Mr. Frank Reicher's performance in *The Scarecrow*, so long will false acting hold its own against true acting on our stage. One of the things that the American theatre of to-day stands most in need of is a sane, persistent movement to educate the public taste in drama and improve the mental tenor of the average audience.

II

But, in present-day America, the problem of educating the theatre-going public, and the further problem of holding it together after it is educated, are both extremely difficult. In reviewing the history of the theatre, we perceive that in every great age of dramatic art the audience has heretofore been concentrated in a single city. Sophocles in Athens, Shakespeare in London, Molière in Paris, could look their auditors in the eyes. The entire state was centered in a city; and the whole theatre-going population of that city was under the immediate observation of the great theatric artists. They were not troubled by any doubt as to where their public was to be found or who the people were who made it up. The theatre-going population of Athens,

London, or Paris was not, according to our modern notions, very large; but it was so concentrated that it could easily and eagerly support a whole great group of dramatists. In America, at the present day, there must actually be more people who are able to appreciate the best dramatic art than there ever were in the Athens of Sophocles, the London of Shakespeare, or the Paris of Molière; there must, indeed, be many times the number, for our population is enormous and the standards of our public education are higher than those of Elizabethan London or the Paris of the *Grand Monarque*. But our problem is to find out who these people are and where they are. They are not concentrated in a single city. They are scattered over a widespread continent; and they are intermingled with eighty million other people who do not care about dramatic art at all. No dramatist can look them in the eyes; and when a play is produced that makes a special appeal to the best minds, the manager does not know where to send it.

Our problem, therefore, is not only to improve our audience but also to organize it. We need to discover what people constitute already our best theatre-going public; we want their names and their addresses; we need to estimate their numerical strength and to study their geographic distribution. If they will come forward publicly,

in a solid organization, and will demand good drama, the managers will have to find it for them, and will be forced, by that same principle of supply and demand, to cry out to the creators for good art until they get it.

III

These two problems — the problem of educating the theatre-going public, and the problem of discovering and organizing the educated public that already exists in scattered units throughout the country — are being coped with courageously by a noteworthy society that is known as the Drama League of America. This society began with an idea; and consequently much more may be hoped from it than from the New Theatre foundation in New York, which began merely with a building. It began, also, without money, and this is another hopeful sign; for it is an error to suppose that the theatre may be uplifted by the unadvised munificence of millionaires. Art, indeed, is ever in need of money; but it is always more in need of thought: and thus far the Drama League has multiplied itself amazingly, without endowment, by the sheer strength of the idea behind it.

This idea occurred, in the first instance, to certain women in Evanston, Illinois, who had formed themselves into a Drama Club for the pur-

pose of studying the best dramatic literature and observing the best plays presented during the season in the neighboring city of Chicago. They appointed a study committee to make out a syllabus of plays and criticisms to be read, and a play-going committee to attend all productions of legitimate drama in Chicago and subsequently tell their fellow-members which of the plays they had attended were the best to see. It then occurred to these women that if their system could be expanded till it covered the continent it would result both in the education and in the organization of a better theatre-going public than the heterogeneous and scattered public that exists to-day. Consequently, on April 25, 1910, they called a meeting at the Art Institute in Chicago, which was attended by delegates from sixty-three clubs, aggregating ten thousand members. At this meeting they expounded their idea; it was accepted with enthusiasm by the affiliated clubs; and the Drama League of America was launched. In three years and a half it has expanded to a membership of over fifty thousand, federally organized in every state of the Union; and the National Federation of Women's Clubs has placed its department of drama study under the direction of the League and advised every woman's club in the country to join the organization.

It is entirely fitting that this great movement

should, at the outset, be fostered mainly by women and by women's clubs; for every student of the contemporary theatre knows that the destiny of our drama has lain for a long time in the hands of women. Shakespeare wrote for an audience made up mainly of men and boys, and gave them *Rosalind* and *Falstaff*: Ibsen and Pinero have written for an audience made up mainly of women, and have given them *Nora Helmer* and *Zoe Blundell*. Our *matinée* audiences are composed almost entirely of women; and our evening audiences are composed of women also, and the men that they have brought with them. Every contemporary playwright knows that it is by the suffrages of women that his work must stand or fall; in fact, the theatre is to-day the one great public institution in which "votes for women" is the rule, and men are overwhelmingly outvoted. Any movement to improve the theatre-going public, any movement to uplift the audience, must therefore be directed toward the women of America; and it is logical and fitting that the campaign of education and the campaign of organization should be conducted by women and by women's clubs.

In conducting both of these campaigns the Drama League of America has proceeded with a reassuring sanity. Believing firmly that any endeavor toward the amelioration of dramatic art

must be conducted democratically, the League has opened its membership to every one and has fixed its annual dues at the low sum of one dollar. Anybody who is interested in the movement may at once become a member of the League by sending one dollar to the secretary of the nearest center. In return he will receive, as they are issued, all the publications of the League. These publications consist of outlines for study prepared by the Educational Committee and bulletins concerning current plays prepared by the Play-going Committee.

The Drama Study Department prepares and issues several courses every year in the study of the drama. Each of these courses is outlined in a syllabus, giving lists of plays and books of reference and criticism, so that any one, by following the syllabus, can read his way easily through the course in any public library. Such eminent educators as Professor George Pierce Baker and Professor Brander Matthews have given their time to the preparation of these outlines. Under the leadership of Mr. W. N. C. Carlton, librarian of the Newberry Library in Chicago, a movement has been instituted for the segregation, in public libraries throughout the country, of the books included in these courses, so that they may be set immediately accessible to every one. By this means any theatre-goer in

any city of America may, without any expenditure of money, educate himself toward an appreciation of the best that has been thought and said in the theatre of the world, and may thus improve the standards of his own taste regarding the contemporary drama.

But the work of the Play-going Committee is even more interesting in its possibilities. This committee is made up of two sections — a local, non-professional group who attend all the legitimate productions in a given center, and an advisory, professional board, consisting of such eminent critics of the drama as Mr. Walter Prichard Eaton, Mr. Charles H. Caffin, Professor Richard Burton, and others of similar standing. The members of the local board pay for their seats and establish no professional relation with the managers. After seeing a certain play, they talk it over: if they deem it unworthy of recommendation, they make no announcement whatsoever to the members of the League: but if they deem it worthy of support, they at once issue a bulletin advising the members of the League to see it and stating succinctly the reasons why it should be seen. They condemn nothing; but, upon the appearance of a good play, they urge their many thousand members to support it with a paying attendance early in its run.

During the first year of the League's activity,

the local committee in Chicago attended fifty-three performances, and issued fourteen bulletins recommending twenty-three plays. The range of their appreciation was catholic. They not only recommended *Little Eyolf*; but it is reassuring to note that they also recommended *The Aviator*, on the ground (to quote their bulletin) that, "like good farce in general, the play is diverting and refreshing." This touch of human nature relieves them of any possible imputation of being "high-brow" in their tastes; for it takes a pretty sane committee to enjoy both the merry breeze of farce and the miasma of the later Ibsen. In the opinion of the present writer, they recommended only two plays which were unworthy of support; and, on the other hand, they committed only a single sin of omission. A similar work is now accomplished in several other centers, — notably New York, Brooklyn, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and Los Angeles; and, in due time, by an exchange of bulletins from one producing center to another, it will become possible so to coördinate this campaign that any recommended play will be greeted by an adequate audience when it moves to a new city on its route.

The president of the Drama League, Mrs. A. Starr Best, of Evanston, Illinois, has written to the present writer, "We have no definite pledge from any of our members: they are merely ex-

pected to support League plays whenever possible, and when attending the theatre to choose a League play." It seems to me that the power of the League would be greatly increased if those of its members who can easily afford to attend at least twenty plays a year would definitely pledge themselves to give their financial support to all the plays which are recommended to them by their Play-going Committee. A pledged attendance of ten thousand in any important producing center would absolutely insure the success of a production; and such an organized audience would be able to demand from the commercial-minded managers a first-class presentation of any play they wished to see. Such productions, for example, as Mr. Laurence Irving's very interesting presentations of those two masterpieces by M. Eugène Brieux, *The Affinity* (*Les Hanneçons*) and *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont*, could have been kept alive for an entire season and sent from city to city if they had been called for by an organized audience pledged to pay its money for good art. And when the League increases to a hundred thousand members, it can, by tabulating geographically its constituents, exert an influence over the bookings of the managers which neither of the two big booking syndicates will be willing to resist. Thus, in time, any play which should be approved by the best scholars and critics of the

drama in America would be insured against financial failure. From this it would be but a step to a condition under which a bad play would not be able, financially, to hold its own: *Everywoman* would go under and *The Thunderbolt* survive.

The Drama League of America is also instituting a movement to encourage the publication of such contemporary plays as are approved by its advisory committee. This, again, is an excellent idea. Our publishers have hitherto been chary of printing plays because they have considered it impossible to sell them. But if only two thousand members of the League would pledge themselves to buy such plays as their committee recommends, there is not a first-class publishing house in America that would not be eager to place these plays upon the market. There must surely be two thousand readers in this country who would be glad to read, for instance, such a delicate and exquisite comedy as *The Mollusc*, by Mr. Hubert Henry Davies. If, by organizing and announcing themselves, they will tell the publishers who and where they are, the publication of such pieces will henceforth be assured.

IV

There is yet another labor which, in the opinion of the present writer, it is the duty of the Drama League to undertake, in pursuance of its

purpose to improve the quality and the constitution of the theatre-going public. This is the labor of discouraging dramatic criticism that is bad by encouraging dramatic criticism that is good. The League should swing the full power of its organized constituency to the support of the very few newspapers and magazines throughout the country that treat the drama seriously. The reason why most newspapers, and even many magazines, report plays as they report baseball games is that their publishers and editors honestly believe that the reading public does not care for scholarly and dignified and earnest criticism. These gentlemen should be taught the falsity of their underestimate of the intelligence and interest of the theatre-going public.

It is a disgrace to our theatre and an insult to our public that, instead of employing men like Mr. A. B. Walkley, Mr. William Archer, and Mr. Bernard Shaw, to teach us what is admirable in the best labors of our dramatists, many of our newspapers of largest circulation and widest influence employ reporters to comment on the color of an actor's waistcoat or a leading lady's eyes. To cultivate a noble audience in America we shall need the service of true criticism and the honorable labors of true critics. But though good criticism, like good art, may be had for the asking, the public must arise and ask for it.

XXIV

THE FUNCTION OF DRAMATIC CRITICISM

IF I were asked to name the one thing that the drama in America stood most in need of at the present moment, I should say dramatic criticism. In order to cultivate the finest flower of any art, it is necessary to coördinate to a common end the complementary activities of the productive spirit and the critical spirit. The theatre in America is at present fairly healthy on the productive side. We have at least one native dramatist whose work is worthy of serious consideration; we have several native playwrights of real promise; we have many able actors; we have three or four great stage-directors; and we have one or two managers who import the best plays of other nations, and make it possible for us to see them on our stage and to compare them with our own. But our dramatic movement is deficient on the critical side. We have at present no dramatic critic of the first rank, — none who may be classed, for instance, with Mr. A. B. Walkley of the *London Times*; and we have only three or

four writers who seem to be making any earnest effort to achieve the purpose of dramatic criticism. It is not that our newspapers and our magazines devote too little attention to the theatre; they devote, indeed, too much; but this attention is not critical in spirit. Nearly every newspaper in the country gives up many columns every week to comment, of some sort, upon the theatre; and many of our magazines conduct departments that are devoted to the stage. But the more we read the newspapers and the magazines, the more we shall perceive that the great majority of our professional commentators on the theatre are not, in the true sense, critics, and do not even aim to be. In fact, the one feature of their writing that strikes us most emphatically is the absence of any endeavor or desire to fulfil the function of dramatic criticism.

Concerning the function of criticism in general, there can be, I think, no question. It was stated once for all by Matthew Arnold, in one of those luminous phrases which, as soon as they are formulated, seem to have been graven forever upon granite. He defined criticism as "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." From this we may derive the definition of dramatic criticism as "a disinter-

ested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the theatre of the world." The critic incurs a double duty,—first, to learn, and secondly, to teach:—to study in general the theatre of the world, and in particular the theatre of his own place and time, in an unfaltering endeavor to discover what is best in the current drama; and then to teach the public what is best by making clear the reasons why. His ultimate responsibility is not to the creator but to the public. It is not his duty to teach Sir Arthur Pinero how to write plays (supposing that were possible!): it is his duty to teach the public how Sir Arthur Pinero *has* written them. But to do this, he must first have learned, and learned from the creative masters of the art.

The first mark of the true critic is, therefore, the eagerness to learn. Criticism requires, as a firm foundation, both a broad and general culture and a deep particular equipment for the work in hand. The critic must be cognizant of life; for the drama is a visioning of life, and how can he judge the counterfeit presentment unless he knows the zest and tang of the original? He must be familiar with the aims and methods of the other arts; for how else can he judge that complex product, a modern acted play, where all the arts do seem to set their seal? He must have studied thoroughly the drama of other times and lands;

for by what standard, otherwise, can he appraise the merit of the drama now at hand? And all these studies should have furnished him material from which to derive inductively the principles to guide him in his judgment. These principles (which are empirical always, and never *a priori*) he should build into a body of belief; and this philosophy of the dramatic art he should expound, whenever necessary, to the public, and should illustrate, whenever possible, in each particular review.

So much for the necessity of culture. Let us turn now to that other necessity of a particular equipment for the work in hand. The art of the drama is a living thing, and like all living things is growing. As a consequence, the philosophy of the drama, in any period of criticism, can be regarded only as pragmatism. A principle will serve only so long as it will serve. A new invention (like electric-lighting, for example) may quickly revolutionize the making of plays and require a consonant revolution in the principles of judging them. The very next play to be produced may demand of the critic that he shall broaden, or materially alter, his body of belief: for — let us insist again — the purpose of criticism is never to announce dogmatically how plays shall be made (for that would be absurd), but always to explain how they *have* been made, and to

elucidate the reasons why. The critic, therefore, can never rest upon his oars; he can never be certain that what he knows already has equipped him fully to appreciate the next important dramatist who may appear. Therefore, he should keep his mind forever fresh and open, to receive and to evaluate each new impression, with all its possibilities of principle. The dramatic critic must be a tireless theatre-goer. To be a theatre-goer is not considered, by most people, difficult; but to maintain a tireless and searching mind amid a making of many plays to which there seems to be no end requires a moral power which ranks only a little on the hither side of the heroic.

And there are other moral qualities without which a writer cannot serviceably fulfil the function of dramatic criticism, however broad his culture, however thorough his equipment. The first of these is sympathy; and this quality is rare. The critic must exercise an eager catholicity of taste. He must appreciate not only what he likes but also what he does not like, provided that there be any adequate reason why other people like it. In his tireless and impersonal searching for the best, he must equably evaluate whatever is good of its kind in any type of play. He should judge a given work in accordance with the endeavor of the author. He must find out what

sort of effect the author intended to produce and then determine to what extent he has succeeded in producing that effect. Ibsen intended a certain effect in *Hedda Gabler*; and if that were a new play, it would not be at all fair for the critic to prejudge it adversely because that effect is totally different from the effect, for example, that Shakespeare intended in *As You Like It*. Though a man may write of Shakespeare with the eloquence of angels, he is still an inefficient critic unless he can both learn and teach the merits of Ibsen, who has made some stir in the theatre of the world with work of an entirely different order. The critic should have no prejudices. Although he may have suffered through ten successive bad plays by a certain author, he must always be ready to recognize the merit of that author's eleventh play if it surprisingly surpasses its predecessors. Authors sometimes grow up. *Bought and Paid For* is written by the author of *An International Marriage* (I beg his pardon for recalling it); and *Kismet* is the work of the same playwright who perpetrated *The Cottage in the Air*. The sympathetic critic should never give up hope: even Mr. Israel Zangwill may ultimately write a good play, if he lives to the allotted age of man.

Since the endeavor of real criticism is to learn and propagate the best, it is evident that its func-

tion is not destructive but constructive; and this is another reason why the critic must be richly endowed with sympathy. There seems to be a prevalent impression that the business of the critic is mainly to make adverse remarks concerning plays that happen to be bad; and this impression — utterly fallacious as it is — is emphatically detrimental to the cause of criticism. It is not the proper function of dramatic criticism to waste good thought upon the subject of bad plays. Most bad plays would die a natural death if they were merely let alone; and the critic should ignore them. His duty is to discover what is good, to explain why it is good, and to do all in his power to make the good prevail. This is more than enough to keep him busy; and to ask him to explain why a bad play is bad is to impose a superfluous task upon his patience. From the point of view of the ideal of criticism, it is surely a mistake for our newspapers to devote an almost equal amount of space to the review of every new play, irrespective of the nature of its aim or the quality of its execution. When a bad play is produced, it would be better to review it in some such terms as these:—“Last evening a play called *Crime*, by John Smith, was produced at Brown’s Theatre, with Mary Jones in the leading rôle. The audience seemed to like it (or seemed not to). There is nothing in it that requires

critical consideration." Sometimes, of course, when a bad play has succeeded and is being patronized by the public in preference to several better plays, it may become the duty of the critic to prove that it is bad, in order, by this negative procedure, to help the better to prevail. When great numbers of innocent theatre-goers seem to think that *Everywoman*, for example, is a work of literature, it becomes necessary for the critic to protest; but even this duty is of minor importance compared with some constructive task of criticism, — the task, for instance, of explaining clearly to the public in what ways *The Thunderbolt* is a masterpiece of craftsmanship. Our magazine writers are granted this great advantage over our newspaper writers, — that they are permitted to ignore unworthy work; but they seem to be expected to devote more space to the consideration of plays that have succeeded than to plays that have failed. This latter editorial requirement leads them often into error. Any question of financial success or failure is impertinent to criticism. Criticism seeks the best; and for the critic it is more important to write at length about a good play that has failed in a night than about a poorer play that has crowded the theatre for an entire season.

But an even more important moral quality that is required of the critic is the delicate faculty of

disinterestedness. He should always tell the truth as he sees it, for the sole and self-sufficient reason that that is how he sees the truth, and should remain impervious to any ulterior consideration. But it is very difficult to be disinterested. Some years ago, when Mr. Belasco was fighting against the organized power of the so-called "theatre trust," our reviewers seemed to find it difficult not to help him in that worthy cause by praising all of his productions, irrespective of whether they happened to be good or bad. Our newspapers seem to have a habit of judging certain plays according to what is called their "news value," instead of according to their quality as works of art. *The Garden of Allah*, for example, which was so bad a play that it should have been dismissed by the critic in a single summary paragraph explaining the essence of its ineffectiveness, was talked about for column after column, — because the scenery was expensive, or the theatre used to be the New Theatre, or the camels were real camels, or the Arabs were imported from the desert, or Mr. Waller's salary was high, or any other of a multitude of reasons beyond the ken of criticism. Meanwhile, Mr. Charles Kenyon's profoundly sincere and moving play entitled *Kindling* was allowed to linger along with very little notice, because it was not supposed to have any "news value."

The disinterested critic will not be influenced by that fetish of editors and publishers whose name is "what the public wants." If the public invariably and infallibly wanted the best that is known and thought, there would be no work for criticism to accomplish. If the public wants *The Never Homes* and does not want *The Thunderbolt*, that is the very reason why the critic should ignore the noisy "show" and write a dozen articles to explain the merits of Sir Arthur's artistry. And, in the pursuance of his labor to help the best art to prevail, the critic should never for a moment consider whether or not the public is likely to enjoy the things he has to say. He should never write for popularity; he should always be inconsiderate of himself; and this is, perhaps, the finest flower of disinterestedness.

The final mark of the true critic is the eagerness to teach. "Every great poet is a teacher," said Wordsworth, "I wish to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." Concerning this conception of the poet's function there may be some question; but I do not think that any one can doubt that every great critic is a teacher. What other word than this so aptly fits a writer whose endeavor is to "propagate the best that is known and thought"? It is the critic's privilege to teach the public what he himself has learned from his tireless study of the works of the creators.

The theatre-going public is not tireless; it lacks, because it is a crowd, both culture and equipment; it is deficient in appreciation, in poise, in sanity, in judgment. It needs the service of the critic to estimate for it the value of its own experience. And the dramatist also needs the service of the critic to elucidate his message and explain his merits to a public that otherwise might miss the aim of his endeavor. The critic acts as a mediator between the artist and the multitude, explaining the one to the many, gathering the many to a fresh and true appreciation of the one.

This point, — that the critic must be considered as a teacher or as nothing, — seems to me to be, in any high view of the question, unassailable; and yet this is precisely the point that is missed in all but a very little of that vast volume of writing concerning the contemporary theatre which pours from the presses of our American newspapers and magazines. Most of our dramatic columns and departments seem to be edited with the idea that the function of the critic is not to teach, but to entertain, not to think, but merely (heaven knows why!) to be facetious. The critic of painting is not expected to be funny about Velasquez, but the critic of the drama seems to be expected to be funny about Ibsen. Of course there are times when the most effective way to teach a certain truth is by laughing very hard:

consider, as an illustration, Mr. Chesterton's bracing habit of leading us to laugh our way into the very presence of his God. But there are also times for giving over laughter, and removing our hats decorously, — in the presence, say, of M. Maeterlinck.

The persevering triviality of the treatment of the drama in our press seems to be due to the fact that the majority of our American publishers have misconceived the sort of interest that our public has begun, latterly, to take in the dramatic art. Our drama is no longer a thing to joke about. Serious works by serious-minded playwrights are being set forth, with adequate acting and exemplary stage-direction, by serious-minded managers; and these works are being patronized by serious-minded people. The mere fact that thousands and thousands of people all over the country paid their money for several successive years to see *The Witching Hour* proves that our American public is not only willing but eager to take an intelligent interest in our best dramatic art. These people — and their name is legion — must be willing also to listen to serious dramatic criticism. Our publishers, for the most part, are a tremulous lot. They are beset forever with the fear — to use their own phrase — of “talking over people's heads.” They do not dare to teach, for fear that nobody will listen. But the

heads of those who read about the theatre in our various publications loom far higher than these publishers imagine; and the danger of talking over them is not nearly so considerable as that other danger — never thought about, apparently — of talking under them. The general reader — that genial gentleman who pays our printer's bills — does not read about the theatre unless he is interested in the theatre; and an interest in the theatre is in itself an indication of intelligence. Any person who cares at all about an art must be capable of caring earnestly about it; any intelligent person must be willing to think seriously concerning a subject that he cares about. Why, then, should we treat our theatre-going public as if it were incapable of thought, and eager only to look at pictures of pretty women and read facetious trivialities?

Our theatre-going public has given ample evidence of its willingness to be taught. What else than this is indicated, for example, by the growth of the Drama League of America, in less than four years, to a membership of fifty thousand in over forty different states? By the mere fact of joining the League these people have practically said, — "We wish to learn the best that is known and thought in the theatre of to-day. We want to patronize the best plays. Tell us which are the best plays, and tell us why." If we had a

single great dramatic critic, like Francisque Sarcey for example, the answer to these people would be easy. The League could answer, "Read his writings; read everything that he writes." But instead of this condition, we observe a multitude of people asking eagerly to be taught, and finding nobody to teach them. And this is the condition that the great majority of our editors confront with an apparently unalterable conviction that the theatre-going public does not want to be taught but wishes merely to be entertained.

But not only is dramatic criticism wanted by the theatre-going public; it is also wanted — it is indeed desperately needed — by our best creative artists in the drama. The dramatist who has written a good play does not need to be told why it is good; but he *does* need that the public shall be told why it is good, by some one whose judgment the public has learned to respect. We are at present passing through a period of over-production in our theatre; and amid the multitudinous bewilderment of presentations, the average theatre-goer is left at a loss to know which plays to patronize. Hence the intervention of the critic is absolutely necessary, in order that the best plays may be assisted to prevail. Not until the function of dramatic criticism assumes among us the dignity and the authority which it exercises now in Paris shall we be at all certain that the

best plays will prevail and the poorest plays go under. And how, unless we can be fairly certain that the best plays will prevail, shall our promising dramatists be encouraged to stride forward boldly in their art, — to conquer new provinces of truth in the expectation of a new appreciation?

For, as Arnold said, it is one of the functions of criticism to prepare the way for new creative effort by establishing a current of fresh and true ideas. The drama, in particular, is an art that derives its inspiration from the attitude of the general and public mind. You cannot give a drama of ideas to an audience devoid of them; but to an audience that has been taught to think, you can give a drama that makes it think profoundly. The critic, by teaching the public to appreciate what is best in the plays it has already seen, may prepare it to appreciate what is best in the plays that our advancing dramatists will set before it ten and twenty years from now. Thus criticism not only follows but precedes creation. The critic is not only an expositor of the best that has been done; he is also a herald and annunciator of the best that is to be.

INDEX

INDEX

- Abbey, Edwin A., 27, 28.
 Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 131, 249.
 Adams, Maude, 262.
 Addison, Joseph, 147.
Admirable Crichton, The, 150.
 Æschylus, 4, 35, 44.
Aiglon, L', 119, 156.
Alice Sit-By-The-Fire, 149.
 Alleyn, Edward, 45.
 Ames, Winthrop, 79.
 Andrea del Sarto, 151, 154.
Angelus, The, 13.
Anitra's Dance, 190.
Antony and Cleopatra, 70, 180.
Arabian Nights, 59.
 Archer, William, 85, 96, 97, 98, 272; *Play-Making*, 85, 96.
 Aristotle, 84, 92, 93, 95, 98, 100.
 Arnold, Matthew, 208, 274, 287.
 Ashwell, Lena, 47.
As You Like It, 5, 22, 185, 278.
 Austen, Jane, 146, 148.
Avariés, Les, 196, 197, 203.
Aviator, The, 269.
 Bagehot, Walter, 147.
 Bahr, Hermann, 18; *The Concert*, 18, 221.
 Baker, Elizabeth, 86, 95, 99; *Chains*, 86, 95.
 Baker, George Pierce, 267.
 Banville, Théodore de, 120.
 Barker, H. Granville, 51, 53, 94, 99, 202; *The Madras House*, 74, 94, 96.
 Barrie, Sir James Matthew, 18, 115, 149, 150, 151, 199, 202, 244, 245, 248; *Alice Sit-By-The-Fire*, 149; *Little Mary*, 150; *Peter Pan*, 87, 115; *The Admirable Crichton*, 150; *The Twelve Pound Look*, 245; *What Every Woman Knows*, 5, 18, 115.
Beach of Falesá, The, 174.
Beau Brummel, 48.
 Belasco, David, 9, 18, 39, 41, 53, 54, 56, 107, 221, 281; *Madam Butterfly*, 18, 245; *The Girl of the Golden West*, 221; *The Return of Peter Grimm*, 36, 39, 40, 55.
 Belasco Theatre, 36.
Bells, The, 48.
 Bennett, Arnold, 99, 156; *Milestones*, 156, 157; *The Great Adventure*, 97.
 Bennett, Richard, 196.
 Benrimo, J. Harry, *see* George C. Hazleton, Jr.
 Best, Mrs. A. Starr, 269.
 Betterton, Thomas, 45.
Birthright, 60, 137.
Blue Bird, The, 5, 84, 163.
 Boccaccio, Giovanni, 13.

- Booth, Edwin, 47, 205.
 Boston Public Library, 27.
 Boswell, James, 86.
Bought and Paid For, 278.
 Boyle, William, 136; *The Building Fund*, 136, 137; *The Mineral Workers*, 136.
 Brady, William A., 261.
 Brioux, Eugène, 10, 196, 198, 199, 203, 270; *Les Avariés*, 196, 197, 203; *Les Hanneçons*, 270; *The Three Daughters of Monsieur Dupont*, 270.
 Browne, Sir Thomas, 215.
 Brownell, William Crary, 114, 149.
 Browning, Robert, 157, 254.
 Brunetière, Ferdinand, 92, 95, 96.
Building Fund, The, 136, 137.
 Bulwer-Lytton, Sir Edward, 47, 220; *Richelieu*, 47, 205, 220; *The Lady of Lyons*, 199, 201.
 Burbage, Richard, 45, 105, 257.
 Burke, Edmund, 152.
 Burton, Richard, 268.
 Caffin, Charles H., 268.
 Calderon, Don Pedro C. de la Barca, 83, 171, 219; *The Devotion of the Cross*, 171.
 Campbell, Mrs. Patrick, 47, 222.
 Carlton, W. N. C., 267.
Carol of Occupations, 104.
 Carpaccio, Vittorio, 68.
 Carré, Michel, 227; *L'Enfant Prodigue*, 227.
 Caruso, Enrico, 229.
Castelfranco Madonna, 12.
 Centlivre, Mrs., 46.
 Century Theatre, 79.
Chains, 86, 95.
Chantecler, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 121, 262.
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 147.
 Chesterton, Gilbert Keith, 284.
Chorus Lady, The, 173.
 Cimabue, 257; *Virgin Enthroned*, 257.
City, The, 20.
 Collier, William, 172.
Comus, 217.
Concert, The, 18, 221.
 Congreve, William, 46.
Conquest of Granada, The, 240.
 Cooper, James Fenimore, 232.
 Coquelin, Constant, 118, 122.
 Corneille, Pierre, 15, 171, 229.
 Corot, J.-B. C., 121.
Cottage in the Air, The, 278.
 Court Theatre, London, 249.
 Craig, Edward Gordon, 28, 58, 61, 62, 63, 64, 79, 80.
Cyrano de Bergerac, 84, 89, 119.
 Daly, Augustin, 221.
Damaged Goods, 196, 203.
 Dante Alighieri, 154, 211; *Hell*, 211.
 Daudet, Alphonse, 252.
 Davies, Hubert Henry, 271; *The Mollusc*, 271.
Deep Purple, The, 217, 224.
 Dennery, Adolphe, 221, 224; *The Two Orphans*, 213, 221.
Devotion of the Cross, The, 171.
 Dickens, Charles, 202.
 Dionysus, Theatre of, 36.
Dissertation on Roast Pig, 152.

- Divine Gift, The*, 71.
 Dobson, Austin, 208.
Doll's House, A, 155.
 Drama League of America,
 264, 265, 266, 267, 268,
 269, 270, 271, 272, 285,
 286.
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,
 48.
 Drury Lane, Theatre Royal,
 22, 52, 221, 222.
 Dryden, John, 240; *The*
 Conquest of Granada, 240.
 Dumas, Alexandre, *fils*, 100.
 Dumas, Alexandre, *père*,
 221; *La Tour de Nesle*,
 220.
 Eaton, Walter Prichard,
 268.
 El Greco, Domenico The-
 otocopuli, 154.
 Eliot, George, 177, 178, 202.
Emperor and Galilean, 240.
Enfant Prodigue, L', 227.
 Ervine, St. John G., 250.
 Euclid, 191.
 Euripides, 45.
Everywoman, 262, 271, 280.
Fanny's First Play, 98.
Farragut, Statue of, 12.
Faun, The, 117.
Fédora, 221.
 Fisher, Charles, 206.
 Fiske, Harrison Grey, 59.
 Fiske, Minnie Maddern, 51,
 222.
 Fitch, Clyde, 20, 48, 51;
 Beau Brummel, 48; *The*
 City, 20.
Flambée, La, 186.
 Fletcher, John, 18.
Follies, 197.
Fool Hath Said, The, 224.
Fool's Revenge, The, 220.
 Forbes, James, 173; *The*
 Chorus Lady, 173.
 Forbes-Robertson, Sir John-
 ston, 229.
 Freytag, Gustav, 94, 95;
 Technique of the Drama,
 94.
 Frohman, Charles, 248.
 Fulton Theatre, 197.
 Galsworthy, John, 10, 95, 99,
 199, 201, 202; *Strife*, 84;
 The Pigeon, 5, 95, 97, 154,
 201.
Gaol Gate, The, 135.
Garden of Allah, The, 56,
 281.
 Garrick, David, 46, 52.
Ghosts, 84, 89, 154, 180.
 Gillette, William, 51, 214,
 224; *Held by the Enemy*,
 214; *Secret Service*, 223,
 224.
 Giorgione, 12; *Castelfranco*
 Madonna, 12.
 Giotto, 148.
Girl of the Golden West,
 The, 221.
 Globe Theatre, 52, 108.
 Goldsmith, Oliver, 165; *She*
 Stoops to Conquer, 165.
Gossip on Romance, A, 211,
 235.
 Grahame, Kenneth, 208.
 Grand Guignol, 248.
Great Adventure, The, 97.
Great Ruby, The, 221.
 Gregory, Lady Augusta,
 127, 131, 133, 135, 249,
 250; *Spreading the News*,
 134; *The Gaol Gate*, 135;
 The Rising of the Moon,
 61, 135; *The Workhouse*
 Ward, 134.
 Guido Reni, 148.
 Guitry, Lucien, 118.

- Habitation Enforced, An*, 14.
Hamlet, 62, 63, 70, 80, 105, 156, 185, 193, 228, 229, 241.
Hannetons, Les, 270.
Harvest Moon, The, 17.
 Hastings, Basil Macdonald, 99.
 Hauptmann, Gerhart, 10, 199.
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 149, 177, 178, 252; *The Scarlet Letter*, 177, 178.
 Hazleton, George C., Jr., 108; *The Yellow Jacket*, 86, 107, 108, 109, 200.
Hedda Gabler, 87, 212, 213, 214, 215, 223, 278.
Held by the Enemy, 214.
Hell, 211.
 Henley, William Ernest, 211.
Henry V, 109.
Hernani, 220.
 Hervieu, Paul, 10.
High Road, The, 182.
Hindle Wakes, 74, 87, 93, 205.
 Hofburgtheater, 79.
 Homer, 146, 237; *Iliad*, 146; *Odyssey*, 146, 237.
 Houghton, Stanley, 76, 82, 93, 99, 205; *Hindle Wakes*, 74, 87, 93, 205.
 Howells, William Dean, 148, 149, 150.
 Hugo, Victor, 6, 118, 171, 220; *Hernani*, 220; *Preface to Cromwell*, 171; *Ruy Blas*, 220.
 Ibsen, Henrik, 75, 100, 155, 156, 180, 181, 203, 229, 240, 266, 269, 278, 283; *A Doll's House*, 155; *Emperor and Galilean*, 240; *Ghosts*, 84, 89, 154, 180; *Hedda Gabler*, 87, 212, 213, 214, 215, 223, 278; *Little Eyolf*, 269; *Rosmersholm*, 181, 222; *The Master Builder*, 156.
Iliad, 146.
International Marriage, An, 278.
In the Shadow of the Glen, 142.
 Irish Players, 58, 60, 61, 131, 132, 133, 249, 251.
 Irving, Laurence, 270.
 Irving, Sir Henry, 48, 51.
 James, Henry, 102, 237.
Jim the Penman, 221.
 Jones, Henry Arthur, 48, 71, 72, 100, 202; *Michael and His Lost Angel*, 48; *Mrs. Dane's Defence*, 47; *The Divine Gift*, 71; *The Liars*, 160.
Judith Zaraine, 223, 224.
Jugend, 30.
 Kean, Edmund, 46.
 Keats, John, 115, 126, 153.
 Kembles, The, 46.
 Kenyon, Charles, 281; *Kindling*, 281.
Kindling, 281.
King Lear, 46.
 King's College Chapel, Cambridge, 146.
 Kipling, Rudyard, 14, 139; *An Habitation Enforced*, 14.
Kismet, 59, 278.
 Kistemaekers, Henry, 186; *La Flambee*, 186.
 Knoblauch, Edward, 117, 156; *Kismet*, 59, 278; *Milestones*, 156, 157; *The Cottage in the Air*, 278; *The Faun*, 117.

- Knowles, Sheridan, 220; *Virginius*, 220.
- Lady of Lyons, The*, 199, 201.
- Lamb, Charles, 152, 208; *Dissertation on Roast Pig*, 152; *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist*, 152.
- Last Judgment, The*, 68.
- Lear*, see *King Lear*.
- Leonardo da Vinci, 12, 154; *Monna Lisa*, 12.
- Liars, The*, 160.
- Lincoln, Abraham, 259.
- Lincoln, Statue of*, 12.
- Little Eyolf*, 269.
- Little Mary*, 150.
- Little Theatre, 9, 79.
- London Times*, 63, 273.
- Lope de Vega, 3, 219; *The New Art of Making Plays*, 3.
- Macbeth*, 156.
- Macready, William Charles, 46.
- Madam Butterfly*, 18, 245.
- Madison Square Theatre, 79.
- Madras House, The*, 74, 94, 96.
- Maeterlinck, Maurice, 10, 19, 38, 39, 76, 199, 284; *Sister Beatrice*, 19, 38; *The Blue Bird*, 5, 84, 163.
- Main, La*, 227.
- Mansfield, Richard, 48.
- Marks, Josephine Preston Peabody, 116; *The Piper*, 116, 117.
- Marlowe, Christopher, 82, 240; *Tamburlaine the Great*, 240.
- Masefield, John, 99.
- Master Builder, The*, 156.
- Matthews, Brander, 267.
- Maupassant, Guy de, 146; *La Parure*, 147.
- Maxine Elliott Theatre, 9.
- McClellan, C. M. S., 223; *Judith Zaraine*, 223, 224.
- Médecin Malgré Lui, Le*, 228.
- Medical Review of Reviews*, 196.
- Merchant of Venice, The*, 22, 57, 221.
- Meredith, George, 202; *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, 202.
- Michael and His Lost Angel*, 48.
- Michel Angelo, 259.
- Mid-Channel*, 151.
- Milestones*, 156, 157.
- Miller, Henry, 51.
- Millet, Jean François, 13; *The Angelus*, 13.
- Milton, John, 217; *Comus*, 217; *Paradise Lost*, 147.
- Mineral Workers, The*, 136.
- Misanthrope, Le*, 160.
- Molière, J.-B. Poquelin de, 16, 51, 83, 84, 126, 160, 161, 185, 200, 228, 250, 261, 262, 263; *Le Médecin Malgré Lui*, 228; *Le Misanthrope*, 160; *Le Tartuffe*, 5, 16.
- Mollusc, The*, 271.
- Monna Lisa*, 12.
- Moonlight Sonata*, 190.
- Morituri*, 249.
- Moscow, Art Theatre of, 62, 80.
- Mrs. Dane's Defence*, 47.
- Murray, T. C., 137; *Birth-right*, 60, 137.
- Music Master, The*, 22.
- Nearer, my God, to Thee*, 190.

- Never Homes, The*, 282.
New Art of Making Plays, The, 3.
Newcomes, The, 148.
 New Theatre, 9, 19, 21, 22, 107, 264, 281.
 Nîmes, Temple at, 146.
 Notre Dame de Paris, 26.
 Noyes, Alfred, 34.

Odyssey, 146, 237.
Œdipus King, 36, 147, 165, 179, 184.
Ordeal of Richard Feverel, The, 202.
Othello, 47, 147, 213, 214, 215.
Other Days, 194.
 Otway, Thomas, 46.

 Pæstum, Temple at, 146.
Paradise Lost, 147.
 Parker, Louis Napoleon, 17;
 Pomander Walk, 17.
Parure, La, 147.
 Paul, 218.
 Peabody, Josephine Preston,
 see Marks.
 Pepys, Samuel, 147.
 Pericles, 257.
Perplexed Husband, The,
 172.
Peter Pan, 87, 115.
 Phidias, 257.
 Pilar-Morin, Mme., 227.
 Pinero, Sir Arthur Wing, 4,
 10, 35, 48, 51, 70, 71, 75,
 84, 100, 125, 149, 150, 151,
 161, 181, 199, 202, 248,
 266, 275, 282; *Mid-Chan-*
 nel, 151; *The Second Mrs.*
 Tanqueray, 47, 84, 89, 181;
 The Thunderbolt, 5, 70, 86,
 116, 125, 149, 151, 161,
 193, 261, 271, 280, 282;
 The Wife Without a
 Smile, 151.

Piper, The, 116, 117.
 Platt, George Foster, 51.
Playboy of the Western
 World, The, 84, 142.
Play-Making, 85, 96.
 Poe, Edgar Allan, 154.
 Pollock, John, 196; *Dam-*
 aged Goods, 196, 203.
Pomander Walk, 17.
 Pompeiian frescoes, 12.
Preface to Cromwell, 171.
 Puvis de Chavannes, 27.

 Racine, Jean, 15, 83, 92, 105,
 171, 229.
 Raphael, 18.
 Regnard, J.-F., 84.
 Reicher, Frank, 262.
 Reinhardt, Max, 29, 30, 31,
 58, 59, 79, 80; *Sumurûn*,
 29, 30, 32, 59, 80, 84, 89.
Return of Peter Grimm,
 The, 36, 39, 40, 55.
Richard III, 237.
Richelieu, 47, 205, 220.
Riders to the Sea, 140.
Rising of the Moon, The, 61,
 135.
Rivals, The, 186.
 Rodin, Auguste, 88, 222;
 The Thinker, 88, 222.
Romanesques, Les, 120.
Rosedale, 199, 200, 201, 202,
 203, 204, 205, 206.
Rosmersholm, 181, 222.
 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, 254.
 Rostand, Edmond, 115, 117,
 118, 119, 120, 121; *Chan-*
 tecler, 115, 116, 117, 118,
 119, 121, 262; *Cyrano de*
 Bergerac, 84, 89, 119;
 L'Aiglon, 119, 156; *La*
 Samaritaine, 119, 120; *Les*
 Romanesques, 120.
Rutherford and Son, 74.
Ruy Blas, 220.

- Sainte Chapelle, 146.
 Saint-Gaudens, Augustus,
 12; *Farragut*, 12; *Lincoln*,
 12.
Samaritaine, La, 119.
 Sand, George, 119.
 Sarcey, Francisque, 286.
 Sardou, Victorien, 219, 221,
 228; *Fédora*, 221.
Scarecrow, The, 262.
Scarlet Letter, The, 177, 178.
School for Scandal, The, 21,
 105, 221, 228.
 Scott, Sir Walter, 232.
 Scribe, Eugène, 100.
Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The,
 47, 84, 89, 181.
Secret Service, 223, 224.
 Shakespeare, William, 4, 15,
 22, 36, 37, 39, 45, 47, 52,
 57, 70, 71, 72, 75, 76, 77,
 81, 83, 92, 94, 105, 106,
 107, 108, 109, 125, 126,
 147, 160, 171, 179, 180,
 185, 200, 230, 233, 237,
 241, 259, 261, 262, 263,
 266, 278; *Antony and Cle-*
opatra, 70, 180; *As You*
Like It, 5, 22, 185, 278;
Hamlet, 62, 63, 70, 80,
 105, 156, 185, 193, 228,
 229, 241; *Henry V*, 109;
King Lear, 46; *Macbeth*,
 156; *Othello*, 47, 147, 213,
 214, 215; *Richard III*,
 237; *The Merchant of*
Venice, 22, 57, 221.
 Shaw, George Bernard, 10,
 98, 199, 248, 272; *Fanny's*
First Play, 98.
 Sheldon, Edward, 182; *The*
High Road, 182.
 Sheridan, Richard Brinsley,
 21, 46, 83, 105; *The Ri-*
vals, 186; *The School for*
Scandal, 21, 105, 221, 228.
- She Stoops to Conquer*, 165.
 Shubert, Lee, 261.
 Siddons, Sarah, 46.
Simplicissimus, 30.
Sins of Society, The, 222.
Sister Beatrice, 19, 38.
 Society for Psychical Re-
 search, 40.
 Socrates, 153.
 Sophocles, 4, 39, 44, 45, 83,
 84, 105, 106, 126, 147, 160,
 165, 180, 200, 257, 262,
 263; *Œdipus King*, 36,
 147, 165, 179, 184.
 Sowerby, Githa, 99; *Ruther-*
ford and Son, 74.
 Spenser, Edmund, 147.
Spreading the News, 134.
 Stevenson, Robert Louis, 6,
 90, 96, 102, 174, 211, 235;
A Gossip on Romance,
 211, 235; *The Beach of*
Falesá, 174; *Treasure*
Island, 232, 235; *Victor*
Hugo's Romances, 6.
 Stuart, Mary, 153.
 Sudermann, Hermann, 10,
 199, 249; *Morituri*, 249.
Sumurun, 29, 30, 32, 59, 80,
 84, 89.
 Sutro, Alfred, 172; *The*
Perplexed Husband, 172.
 Synge, John Millington, 60,
 131, 138, 139, 140, 142; *In*
the Shadow of the Glen,
 142; *Riders to the Sea*,
 140; *The Playboy of the*
Western World, 84, 142;
The Well of the Saints,
 139.
- Tamburlaine the Great*, 240.
Tartufe, Le, 5, 16.
 Taylor, Tom, 47, 220; *The*
Fool's Revenge, 220; *The*
Ticket-of-Leave Man, 221.

- Technique of the Drama*, 94.
 Tennyson, Alfred, Lord, 84.
 Terry, Ellen, 48.
 Thackeray, William Make-
 peace, 148, 149, 150, 202;
 The Newcomes, 148.
Thinker, The, 88, 222.
 Thomas, Augustus, 8, 17, 87;
 The Harvest Moon, 17;
 The Witching Hour, 17,
 284.
*Three Daughters of Mon-
 sieur Dupont, The*, 370.
Thunderbolt, The, 5, 70, 86,
 116, 125, 149, 151, 161,
 193, 261, 271, 280, 282.
Ticket-of-Leave Man, The,
 221.
 Tintoretto, Jacopo Robusti,
 68; *The Last Judgment*,
 68.
Tour de Nesle, La, 220.
Treasure Island, 232, 235.
Twelve Pound Look, The,
 245.
Two Orphans, The, 213, 221.
 Tyler, George C., 55, 56.
 Velasquez, 283.
Venus of Melos, 12, 15, 34,
 88, 146.
Virgin Enthroned, 257.
Virginius, 220.
 Walkley, Arthur Bingham,
 272, 273.
 Wallack, Lester, 199, 200,
 203, 204, 206; *Rosedale*,
 199, 200, 201, 202, 203,
 204, 205, 206.
 Waller, Lewis, 281.
 Washington, George, 259.
Well of the Saints, The,
 139.
What Every Woman Knows,
 5, 18, 115.
Whip, The, 221.
 Whitman, Walt, 104, 138,
 154, 155, 176; *Carol of
 Occupations*, 104.
Wife Without a Smile, The,
 151.
 Winter, William, 47, 194,
 195, 197, 198, 199, 201,
 207, 220; *Other Days*, 194.
Witch, The, 22.
Witching Hour, The, 17,
 284.
 Wordsworth, William, 130,
 282.
Workhouse Ward, The, 134.
 Yeats, William Butler, 127.
Yellow Jacket, The, 86, 107,
 108, 109, 200.
 Zangwill, Israel, 278.

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